The World's Classics

XXV

THE WORKS OF WILLIAM HAZLITT—III

WINTERSLOW

ESSAYS AND CHARACTERS WRITTEN THERE

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BY

WILLIAM HAZLITT

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OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON, NEW YORK, AND TORONTO

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Born: Maidstone, Kent, April 10, 1778.
Died: London, September 18, 1830.

These Essays were first published collectively in the year 1839. *In 'The World's Classics' they were first published in* 1902, *and reprinted in* 1906.

Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, Printers to His Majesty

PREFACE TO THE EDITION OF 1850

Winterslow is a village of Wiltshire, between Salisbury and Andover, where my father, during a considerable portion of his life, spent several months of each year, latterly, at an ancient inn on the Great Western Road, called Winterslow Hut. One of his chief attractions hither were the noble woods of Tytherleigh or Tudorleigh, round Norman Court, the seat of Mr. Baring Wall, M.P., whose proffered kindness to my father, on a critical occasion, was thoroughly appreciated by the very sensitiveness which declined its acceptance, and will always be gratefully remembered by myself. Another feature was Clarendon Wood—whence the noble family of Clarendon derived their title—famous besides for the Constitutions signed in the palace which once rose proudly amongst its stately trees, but of which scarce a vestige remains. In another direction, within easy distance, gloams Stonehenge, visited by my father, less perhaps for its historical associations than for its appeal to the imagination, the upright stones seeming in the dim twilight, or in the drizzling mist, almost continuous in the locality, so many spectre-Druids, moaning over the past, and over their brethren prostrate about them. At no great distance, in another direction, are the fine pictures of Lord Radnor, and somewhat further, those of Wilton House. But the chief happiness was the thorough quiet of the place, the sole interruption of which was the passage, to and fro, of the London mails. The Hut stands in a valley, equidistant about a mile from two tolerably high hills, at the summit of which, on their approach either way, the guards used to blow forth their ad-

monition to the hostler. The sound, coming through the clear, pure air, was another agreeable feature in the day, reminiscentiary of the great city that my father so loved and so loathed. In olden times, when we lived in the village itself—a mile up the hill opposite —behind the Hut, Salisbury Plain stretches away mile after mile of open space—the reminiscence of the metropolis would be, from time to time, furnished in the pleasantest of ways by the presence of some London friends; among these, dearly loved and honoured there, as everywhere else, Charles and Mary Lamb paid us frequent visits, rambling about all the time, thorough Londoners in a thoroughly country place, delighted and wondering and wondered at. For such reasons, and for the other reason, which I mention incidentally, that Winterslow is my own native place, I have given its name to this collection of 'Essays and Characters written there'; as, indeed, practically were very many of his works, for it was there that most of his thinking was done.

WILLIAM HAZLITT.

CHELSEA, *Jan.* 1850.

CONTENTS

		PAGE
I.	MY FIRST ACQUAINTANCE WITH POETS	1
II.	OF PERSONS ONE WOULD WISH TO HAVE SEEN	24
III.	ON PARTY SPIRIT	40
IV.	ON THE FEELING OF IMMORTALITY IN YOUTH	45
V.	ON PUBLIC OPINION	53
VI.	ON PERSONAL IDENTITY	67
VII.	MIND AND MOTIVE	82
VIII.	ON MEANS AND ENDS	97
IX.	MATTER AND MANNER	108
X.	ON CONSISTENCY OF OPINION	115
XI.	PROJECT FOR A NEW THEORY OF CIVIL AND CRIMINAL LEGISLATION	130
XII.	ON THE CHARACTER OF BURKE	155
XIII.	ON THE CHARACTER OF FOX	173
XIV.	ON THE CHARACTER OF MR. PITT	185
XV.	ON THE CHARACTER OF LORD CHATHAM	191
XVI.	BELIEF, WHETHER VOLUNTARY?	196
XVII.	A FAREWELL TO ESSAY-WRITING	205

HAZLITT'S ESSAYS

ESSAY I

MY FIRST ACQUAINTANCE WITH POETS

My father was a Dissenting Minister, at Wem, in Shropshire; and in the year 1798 (the figures that compose the date are to me like the 'dreaded name of Demogorgon') Mr. Coleridge came to Shrewsbury, to succeed Mr. Rowe in the spiritual charge of a Unitarian Congregation there. He did not come till late on the Saturday afternoon before he was to preach; and Mr. Rowe, who himself went down to the coach, in a state of anxiety and expectation, to look for the arrival of his successor, could find no one at all answering the description but a round-faced man, in a short black coat (like a shooting-jacket) which hardly seemed to have been made for him, but who seemed to be talking at a great rate to his fellow passengers. Mr. Rowe had scarce returned to give an account of his disappointment when the round-faced man in black entered, and dissipated all doubts on the subject by beginning to talk. He did not cease while he stayed; nor has he since, that I know of. He held the good town of Shrewsbury in delightful suspense for three weeks that he remained there, 'fluttering the *proud Salopians*, like an eagle in a dove-cote'; and the Welch mountains that skirt the horizon with their tempestuous confusion, agree to have heard no such mystic sounds since the days of

'High-born Hoel's harp or soft Llewellyn's lay.'

As we passed along between Wem and Shrewsbury,

and I eyed their blue tops seen through the wintry branches, or the red rustling leaves of the sturdy oak-trees by the road-side, a sound was in my ears as of a Syren's song; I was stunned, startled with it, as from deep sleep; but I had no notion then that I should ever be able to express my admiration to others in motley imagery or quaint allusion, till the light of his genius shone into my soul, like the sun's rays glittering in the puddles of the road. I was at that time dumb, inarticulate, helpless, like a worm by the way-side, crushed, bleeding, lifeless; but now, bursting the deadly bands that bound them,

'With Styx nine times round them,'

my ideas float on winged words, and as they expand their plumes, catch the golden light of other years. My soul has indeed remained in its original bondage, dark, obscure, with longings infinite and unsatisfied; my heart, shut up in the prison-house of this rude clay, has never found, nor will it ever find, a heart to speak to; but that my understanding also did not remain dumb and brutish, or at length found a language to express itself, I owe to Coleridge. But this is not to my purpose.

My father lived ten miles from Shrewsbury, and was in the habit of exchanging visits with Mr. Rowe, and with Mr. Jenkins of Whitchurch (nine miles farther on), according to the custom of Dissenting Ministers in each other's neighbourhood. A line of communication is thus established, by which the flame of civil and religious liberty is kept alive, and nourishes its smouldering fire unquenchable, like the fires in the *Agamemnon* of Æschylus, placed at different stations, that waited for ten long years to announce with their blazing pyramids the destruction of Troy. Coleridge had agreed to come over and see my father, according to the courtesy of the country, as Mr. Rowe's probable successor; but in the meantime, I had gone to hear him preach the Sunday after his arrival. A poet and a philosopher getting up into

a Unitarian pulpit to preach the gospel, was a romance in these degenerate days, a sort of revival of the primitive spirit of Christianity, which was not to be resisted.

It was in January of 1798, that I rose one morning before daylight, to walk ten miles in the mud, to hear this celebrated person preach. Never, the longest day I have to live, shall I have such another walk as this cold, raw, comfortless one, in the winter of the year 1798. *Il y a des impressions que ni le tems ni les circonstances peuvent effacer. Dussé-je vivre des siècles entiers, le doux tems de ma jeunesse ne peut renaître pour moi, ni s'effacer jamais dans ma mémoire.* When I got there, the organ was playing the 100th Psalm, and when it was done, Mr. Coleridge rose and gave out his text, 'And he went up into the mountain to pray, HIMSELF, ALONE.' As he gave out this text, his voice 'rose like a steam of rich distilled perfumes,' and when he came to the two last words, which he pronounced loud, deep, and distinct, it seemed to me, who was then young, as if the sounds had echoed from the bottom of the human heart, and as if that prayer might have floated in solemn silence through the universe. The idea of St. John came into my mind, 'of one crying in the wilderness, who had his loins girt about, and whose food was locusts and wild honey.' The preacher then launched into his subject, like an eagle dallying with the wind. The sermon was upon peace and war; upon church and state—not their alliance but their separation—on the spirit of the world and the spirit of Christianity, not as the same, but as opposed to one another. He talked of those who had 'inscribed the cross of Christ on banners dripping with human gore.' He made a poetical and pastoral excursion—and to show the fatal effects of war, drew a striking contrast between the simple shepherd-boy, driving his team afield, or sitting under the hawthorn, piping to his flock, 'as though he should never be old,' and the same poor country lad, crimped, kidnapped, brought into town,

made drunk at an alehouse, turned into a wretched drummer-boy, with his hair sticking on end with powder and pomatum, a long cue at his back, and tricked out in the loathsome finery of the profession of blood :

'Such were the notes our once-loved poet sung.'

And for myself, I could not have been more delighted if I had heard the music of the spheres. Poetry and Philosophy had met together. Truth and Genius had embraced, under the eye and with the sanction of Religion. This was even beyond my hopes. I returned home well satisfied. The sun that was still labouring pale and wan through the sky, obscured by thick mists, seemed an emblem of the *good cause* ; and the cold dank drops of dew, that hung half melted on the beard of the thistle, had something genial and refreshing in them; for there was a spirit of hope and youth in all nature, that turned everything into good. The face of nature had not then the brand of Jus Divinum on it :

'Like to that sanguine flower inscrib'd with woe.'

On the Tuesday following, the half-inspired speaker came. I was called down into the room where he was, and went half-hoping, half-afraid. He received me very graciously, and I listened for a long time without uttering a word. I did not suffer in his opinion by my silence. 'For those two hours,' he afterwards was pleased to say, 'he was conversing with William Hazlitt's forehead !' His appearance was different from what I had anticipated from seeing him before. At a distance, and in the dim light of the chapel, there was to me a strange wildness in his aspect, a dusky obscurity, and I thought him pitted with the small-pox. His complexion was at that time clear, and even bright—

'As are the children of yon azure sheen.'

His forehead was broad and high, light as if built of ivory, with large projecting eyebrows, and his eyes

rolling beneath them, like a sea with darkened lustre. 'A certain tender bloom his face o'erspread,' a purple tinge as we see it in the pale thoughtful complexions of the Spanish portrait-painters, Murillo and Valasquez. His mouth was gross, voluptuous, open, eloquent; his chin good-humoured and round; but his nose, the rudder of the face, the index of the will, was small, feeble, nothing—like what he has done. It might seem that the genius of his face as from a height surveyed and projected him (with sufficient capacity and huge aspiration) into the world unknown of thought and imagination, with nothing to support or guide his veering purpose, as if Columbus had launched his adventurous course for the New World in a scallop, without oars or compass. So, at least, I comment on it after the event. Coleridge, in his person, was rather above the common size, inclining to the corpulent, or like Lord Hamlet, 'somewhat fat and pursy.' His hair (now, alas! grey) was then black and glossy as the raven's, and fell in smooth masses over his forehead. This long pendulous hair is peculiar to enthusiasts, to those whose minds tend heavenward; and is traditionally inseparable (though of a different colour) from the pictures of Christ. It ought to belong, as a character, to all who preach *Christ crucified*, and Coleridge was at that time one of those!

It was curious to observe the contrast between him and my father, who was a veteran in the cause, and then declining into the vale of years. He had been a poor Irish lad, carefully brought up by his parents, and sent to the University of Glasgow (where he studied under Adam Smith) to prepare him for his future destination. It was his mother's proudest wish to see her son a Dissenting Minister. So, if we look back to past generations (as far as eye can reach), we see the same hopes, fears, wishes, followed by the same disappointments, throbbing in the human heart; and so we may see them (if we look forward) rising up for ever, and disappearing, like vapourish

bubbles, in the human breast! After being tossed about from congregation to congregation in the heats of the Unitarian controversy, and squabbles about the American war, he had been relegated to an obscure village, where he was to spend the last thirty years of his life, far from the only converse that he loved, the talk about disputed texts of Scripture, and the cause of civil and religious liberty. Here he passed his days, repining, but resigned, in the study of the Bible, and the perusal of the Commentators—huge folios, not easily got through, one of which would outlast a winter! Why did he pore on these from morn to night (with the exception of a walk in the fields or a turn in the garden to gather broccoli-plants or kidney beans of his own rearing, with no small degree of pride and pleasure)? Here were 'no figures nor no fantasies'—neither poetry nor philosophy—nothing to dazzle, nothing to excite modern curiosity; but to his lack-lustre eyes there appeared within the pages of the ponderous, unwieldy, neglected tomes, the sacred name of JEHOVAH in Hebrew capitals: pressed down by the weight of the style, worn to the last fading thinness of the understanding, there were glimpses, glimmering notions of the patriarchal wanderings, with palm-trees hovering in the horizon, and processions of camels at the distance of three thousand years; there was Moses with the Burning Bush, the number of the Twelve Tribes, types, shadows, glosses on the law and the prophets; there were discussions (dull enough) on the age of Methuselah, a mighty speculation! there were outlines, rude guesses at the shape of Noah's Ark and of the riches of Solomon's Temple; questions as to the date of the creation, predictions of the end of all things; the great lapses of time, the strange mutations of the globe were unfolded with the voluminous leaf, as it turned over; and though the soul might slumber with an hieroglyphic veil of inscrutable mysteries drawn over it, yet it was in a slumber ill-exchanged for all the sharpened realities of sense,

wit, fancy, or reason. My father's life was comparatively a dream; but it was a dream of infinity and eternity, of death, the resurrection, and a judgment to come!

No two individuals were ever more unlike than were the host and his guest. A poet was to my father a sort of nondescript; yet whatever added grace to the Unitarian cause was to him welcome. He could hardly have been more surprised or pleased, if our visitor had worn wings. Indeed, his thoughts had wings: and as the silken sounds rustled round our little wainscoted parlour, my father threw back his spectacles over his forehead, his white hairs mixing with its sanguine hue; and a smile of delight beamed across his rugged, cordial face, to think that Truth had found a new ally in Fancy![1] Besides, Coleridge seemed to take considerable notice of me, and that of itself was enough. He talked very familiarly, but agreeably, and glanced over a variety of subjects. At dinner-time he grew more animated, and dilated in a very edifying manner on Mary Wolstonecraft and Mackintosh. The last, he said, he considered (on my father's speaking of his *Vindiciæ Gallicæ* as a capital performance) as a clever, scholastic man—a master of the topics—or, as the ready warehouseman of letters, who knew exactly where to lay his hand on what he wanted, though the goods were not his own. He thought him no match for Burke, either in style or matter. Burke was a metaphysician, Mackintosh a mere logician. Burke was an orator (almost a poet) who reasoned in figures, because he had an eye for nature: Mackintosh, on the other hand, was a rhetorician, who had only an eye to commonplaces. On this I ventured to say that I had always entertained

[1] My father was one of those who mistook his talent, after all. He used to be very much dissatisfied that I preferred his *Letters* to his *Sermons*. The last were forced and dry; the first came naturally from him. For ease, half-plays on words, and a supine, monkish, indolent pleasantry, I have never seen them equalled.

a great opinion of Burke, and that (as far as I could find) the speaking of him with contempt might be made the test of a vulgar, democratical mind. This was the first observation I ever made to Coleridge, and he said it was a very just and striking one. I remember the leg of Welsh mutton and the turnips on the table that day had the finest flavour imaginable. Coleridge added that Mackintosh and Tom Wedgwood (of whom, however, he spoke highly) had expressed a very indifferent opinion of his friend Mr. Wordsworth, on which he remarked to them—'He strides on so far before you, that he dwindles in the distance!' Godwin had once boasted to him of having carried on an argument with Mackintosh for three hours with dubious success; Coleridge told him—'If there had been a man of genius in the room he would have settled the question in five minutes.' He asked me if I had ever seen Mary Wolstonecraft, and I said, I had once for a few moments, and that she seemed to me to turn off Godwin's objections to something she advanced with quite a playful, easy air. He replied, that 'this was only one instance of the ascendency which people of imagination exercised over those of mere intellect.' He did not rate Godwin very high[1] (this was caprice or prejudice, real or affected), but he had a great idea of Mrs. Wolstonecraft's powers of conversation; none at all of her talent for book-making. We talked a little about Holcroft. He had been asked if he was not much struck *with* him, and he said, he thought himself in more danger of being struck *by* him. I complained that he would not let me get on at all, for he required a definition of every the commonest word, exclaiming, 'What do you mean by a *sensation*, Sir? What do you mean by an *idea*?' This, Coleridge said, was barricadoing the road to

[1] He complained in particular of the presumption of his attempting to establish the future immortality of man, 'without' (as he said) 'knowing what Death was or what Life was'—and the tone in which he pronounced these two words seemed to convey a complete image of both.

truth; it was setting up a turnpike-gate at every step we took. I forget a great number of things, many more than I remember; but the day passed off pleasantly, and the next morning Mr. Coleridge was to return to Shrewsbury. When I came down to breakfast, I found that he had just received a letter from his friend, T. Wedgwood, making him an offer of 150*l.* a year if he chose to waive his present pursuit, and devote himself entirely to the study of poetry and philosophy. Coleridge seemed to make up his mind to close with this proposal in the act of tying on one of his shoes. It threw an additional damp on his departure. It took the wayward enthusiast quite from us to cast him into Deva's winding vales, or by the shores of old romance. Instead of living at ten miles' distance, of being the pastor of a Dissenting congregation at Shrewsbury, he was henceforth to inhabit the Hill of Parnassus, to be a Shepherd on the Delectable Mountains. Alas! I knew not the way thither, and felt very little gratitude for Mr. Wedgwood's bounty. I was presently relieved from this dilemma; for Mr. Coleridge, asking for a pen and ink, and going to a table to write something on a bit of card, advanced towards me with undulating step, and giving me the precious document, said that that was his address, *Mr. Coleridge, Nether-Stowey, Somersetshire*; and that he should be glad to see me there in a few weeks' time, and, if I chose, would come half-way to meet me. I was not less surprised than the shepherd-boy (this simile is to be found in *Cassandra*), when he sees a thunderbolt fall close at his feet. I stammered out my acknowledgments and acceptance of this offer (I thought Mr. Wedgwood's annuity a trifle to it) as well as I could; and this mighty business being settled, the poet preacher took leave, and I accompanied him six miles on the road. It was a fine morning in the middle of winter, and he talked the whole way. The scholar in Chaucer is described as going

——'Sounding on his way.'

So Coleridge went on his. In digressing, in dilating, in passing from subject to subject, he appeared to me to float in air, to slide on ice. He told me in confidence (going along) that he should have preached two sermons before he accepted the situation at Shrewsbury, one on Infant Baptism, the other on the Lord's Supper, showing that he could not administer either, which would have effectually disqualified him for the object in view. I observed that he continually crossed me on the way by shifting from one side of the footpath to the other. This struck me as an odd movement; but I did not at that time connect it with any instability of purpose or involuntary change of principle, as I have done since. He seemed unable to keep on in a straight line. He spoke slightingly of Hume (whose *Essay on Miracles* he said was stolen from an objection started in one of South's sermons—*Credat Judæus Appella!*) I was not very much pleased at this account of Hume, for I had just been reading, with infinite relish, that completest of all metaphysical *chokepears*, his *Treatise on Human Nature*, to which the *Essays* in point of scholastic subtility and close reasoning, are mere elegant trifling, light summer reading. Coleridge even denied the excellence of Hume's general style, which I think betrayed a want of taste or candour. He however made me amends by the manner in which he spoke of Berkeley. He dwelt particularly on his *Essay on Vision* as a masterpiece of analytical reasoning. So it undoubtedly is. He was exceedingly angry with Dr. Johnson for striking the stone with his foot, in allusion to this author's *Theory of Matter and Spirit*, and saying, 'Thus I confute him, Sir.' Coleridge drew a parallel (I don't know how he brought about the connection) between Bishop Berkeley and Tom Paine. He said the one was an instance of a subtle, the other of an acute mind, than which no two things could be more distinct. The one was a shop-boy's quality, the other the characteristic of a philosopher. He considered Bishop Butler as a true philosopher,

a profound and conscientious thinker, a genuine reader of nature and his own mind. He did not speak of his *Analogy*, but of his *Sermons at the Rolls' Chapel*, of which I had never heard. Coleridge somehow always contrived to prefer the *unknown* to the *known*. In this instance he was right. The *Analogy* is a tissue of sophistry, of wire-drawn, theological special-pleading; the *Sermons* (with the preface to them) are in a fine vein of deep, matured reflection, a candid appeal to our observation of human nature, without pedantry and without bias. I told Coleridge I had written a few remarks, and was sometimes foolish enough to believe that I had made a discovery on the same subject (the *Natural disinterestedness of the Human Mind*)—and I tried to explain my view of it to Coleridge, who listened with great willingness, but I did not succeed in making myself understood. I sat down to the task shortly afterwards for the twentieth time, got new pens and paper, determined to make clear work of it, wrote a few meagre sentences in the skeleton style of a mathematical demonstration, stopped half-way down the second page; and, after trying in vain to pump up any words, images, notions, apprehensions, facts, or observations, from that gulf of abstraction in which I had plunged myself for four or five years preceding, gave up the attempt as labour in vain, and shed tears of helpless despondency on the blank, unfinished paper. I can write fast enough now. Am I better than I was then? Oh no! One truth discovered, one pang of regret at not being able to express it, is better than all the fluency and flippancy in the world. Would that I could go back to what I then was! Why can we not revive past times as we can revisit old places? If I had the quaint Muse of Sir Philip Sidney to assist me, I would write a *Sonnet to the Road between Wem and Shrewsbury*, and immortalise every step of it by some fond enigmatical conceit. I would swear that the very milestones had ears, and that Harmer hill stooped with all its pines, to listen to a poet, as he passed! I remember but one

other topic of discourse in this walk. He mentioned Paley, praised the naturalness and clearness of his style, but condemned his sentiments, thought him a mere time-serving casuist, and said that 'the fact of his work on Moral and Political Philosophy being made a text-book in our Universities was a disgrace to the national character.' We parted at the six-mile stone; and I returned homeward, pensive, but much pleased. I had met with unexpected notice from a person whom I believed to have been prejudiced against me. 'Kind and affable to me had been his condescension, and should be honoured ever with suitable regard.' He was the first poet I had known, and he certainly answered to that inspired name. I had heard a great deal of his powers of conversation and was not disappointed. In fact, I never met with anything at all like them, either before or since. I could easily credit the accounts which were circulated of his holding forth to a large party of ladies and gentlemen, an evening or two before, on the Berkeleian Theory, when he made the whole material universe look like a transparency of fine words; and another story (which I believe he has somewhere told himself) of his being asked to a party at Birmingham, of his smoking tobacco and going to sleep after dinner on a sofa, where the company found him, to their no small surprise, which was increased to wonder when he started up of a sudden, and rubbing his eyes, looked about him, and launched into a three hours' description of the third heaven, of which he had had a dream, very different from Mr. Southey's *Vision of Judgment*, and also from that other *Vision of Judgment*, which Mr. Murray, the Secretary of the Bridge-street Junta, took into his especial keeping.

On my way back I had a sound in my ears—it was the voice of Fancy; I had a light before me—it was the face of Poetry. The one still lingers there, the other has not quitted my side! Coleridge, in truth, met me half-way on the ground of philosophy, or I should not have been won over to his imaginative creed. I had

an uneasy, pleasurable sensation all the time, till I was to visit him. During those months the chill breath of winter gave me a welcoming; the vernal air was balm and inspiration to me. The golden sunsets, the silver star of evening, lighted me on my way to new hopes and prospects. *I was to visit Coleridge in the spring.* This circumstance was never absent from my thoughts, and mingled with all my feelings. I wrote to him at the time proposed, and received an answer postponing my intended visit for a week or two, but very cordially urging me to complete my promise then. This delay did not damp, but rather increased my ardour. In the meantime, I went to Llangollen Vale, by way of initiating myself in the mysteries of natural scenery; and I must say I was enchanted with it. I had been reading Coleridge's description of England in his fine *Ode on the Departing Year,* and I applied it, *con amore,* to the objects before me. That valley was to me (in a manner) the cradle of a new existence: in the river that winds through it, my spirit was baptized in the waters of Helicon!

I returned home, and soon after set out on my journey with unworn heart, and untired feet. My way lay through Worcester and Gloucester, and by Upton, where I thought of Tom Jones and the adventure of the muff. I remember getting completely wet through one day, and stopping at an inn (I think it was at Tewkesbury) where I sat up all night to read *Paul and Virginia.* Sweet were the showers in early youth that drenched my body, and sweet the drops of pity that fell upon the books I read! I recollect a remark of Coleridge's upon this very book that nothing could show the gross indelicacy of French manners and the entire corruption of their imagination more strongly than the behaviour of the heroine in the last fatal scene, who turns away from a person on board the sinking vessel, that offers to save her life, because he has thrown off his clothes to assist him in swimming. Was this a time to think of such

a circumstance? I once hinted to Wordsworth, as we were sailing in his boat on Grasmere lake, that I thought he had borrowed the idea of his *Poems on the Naming of Places* from the local inscriptions of the same kind in *Paul and Virginia*. He did not own the obligation, and stated some distinction without a difference in defence of his claim to originality. Any, the slightest variation, would be sufficient for this purpose in his mind; for whatever *he* added or altered would inevitably be worth all that any one else had done, and contain the marrow of the sentiment. I was still two days before the time fixed for my arrival, for I had taken care to set out early enough. I stopped these two days at Bridgewater; and when I was tired of sauntering on the banks of its muddy river, returned to the inn and read *Camilla*. So have I loitered my life away, reading books, looking at pictures, going to plays, hearing, thinking, writing on what pleased me best. I have wanted only one thing to make me happy; but wanting that have wanted everything!

I arrived, and was well received. The country about Nether Stowey is beautiful, green and hilly, and near the sea-shore. I saw it but the other day, after an interval of twenty years, from a hill near Taunton. How was the map of my life spread out before me, as the map of the country lay at my feet! In the afternoon, Coleridge took me over to All-Foxden, a romantic old family mansion of the St. Aubins, where Wordsworth lived. It was then in the possession of a friend of the poet's, who gave him the free use of it. Somehow, that period (the time just after the French Revolution) was not a time when *nothing was given for nothing*. The mind opened and a softness might be perceived coming over the heart of individuals, beneath 'the scales that fence' our self-interest. Wordsworth himself was from home, but his sister kept house, and set before us a frugal repast; and we had free access to her brother's poems, the *Lyrical Ballads*, which were still in manuscript, or

in the form of *Sybilline Leaves*. I dipped into a few of these with great satisfaction, and with the faith of a novice. I slept that night in an old room with blue hangings, and covered with the round-faced family portraits of the age of George I. and II., and from the wooded declivity of the adjoining park that overlooked my window, at the dawn of day, could

——'hear the loud stag speak.'

In the outset of life (and particularly at this time I felt it so) our imagination has a body to it. We are in a state between sleeping and waking, and have indistinct but glorious glimpses of strange shapes, and there is always something to come better than what we see. As in our dreams the fulness of the blood gives warmth and reality to the coinage of the brain, so in youth our ideas are clothed, and fed, and pampered with our good spirits; we breathe thick with thoughtless happiness, the weight of future years presses on the strong pulses of the heart, and we repose with undisturbed faith in truth and good. As we advance, we exhaust our fund of enjoyment and of hope. We are no longer wrapped in *lamb's-wool*, lulled in Elysium. As we taste the pleasures of life, their spirit evaporates, the sense palls; and nothing is left but the phantoms, the lifeless shadows of what *has been!*

That morning, as soon as breakfast was over, we strolled out into the park, and seating ourselves on the trunk of an old ash-tree that stretched along the ground, Coleridge read aloud with a sonorous and musical voice, the ballad of *Betty Foy*. I was not critically or sceptically inclined. I saw touches of truth and nature, and took the rest for granted. But in the *Thorn*, the *Mad Mother*, and the *Complaint of a Poor Indian Woman*, I felt that deeper power and pathos which have been since acknowledged,

'In spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,'

as the characteristics of this author; and the sense of a new style and a new spirit in poetry came over me. It had to me something of the effect that arises from the turning up of the fresh soil, or of the first welcome breath of Spring:

> 'While yet the trembling year is unconfirmed.'

Coleridge and myself walked back to Stowey that evening, and his voice sounded high

> 'Of Providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate,
> Fix'd fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute,'

as we passed through echoing grove, by fairy stream or waterfall, gleaming in the summer moonlight! He lamented that Wordsworth was not prone enough to believe in the traditional superstitions of the place, and that there was a something corporeal, a *matter-of-fact-ness*, a clinging to the palpable, or often to the petty, in his poetry, in consequence. His genius was not a spirit that descended to him through the air; it sprung out of the ground like a flower, or unfolded itself from a green spray, on which the goldfinch sang. He said, however (if I remember right), that this objection must be confined to his descriptive pieces, that his philosophic poetry had a grand and comprehensive spirit in it, so that his soul seemed to inhabit the universe like a palace, and to discover truth by intuition, rather than by deduction. The next day Wordsworth arrived from Bristol at Coleridge's cottage. I think I see him now. He answered in some degree to his friend's description of him, but was more gaunt and Don Quixote-like. He was quaintly dressed (according to the *costume* of that unconstrained period) in a brown fustian jacket and striped pantaloons. There was something of a roll, a lounge in his gait, not unlike his own *Peter Bell*. There was a severe, worn pressure of thought about his temples, a fire in his eye (as if he saw something in objects more than the outward appearance), an

intense, high, narrow forehead, a Roman nose, cheeks furrowed by strong purpose and feeling, and a convulsive inclination to laughter about the mouth, a good deal at variance with the solemn, stately expression of the rest of his face. Chantrey's bust wants the marking traits; but he was teased into making it regular and heavy: Haydon's head of him, introduced into the *Entrance of Christ into Jerusalem*, is the most like his drooping weight of thought and expression. He sat down and talked very naturally and freely, with a mixture of clear, gushing accents in his voice, a deep guttural intonation, and a strong tincture of the northern *burr*, like the crust on wine. He instantly began to make havoc of the half of a Cheshire cheese on the table, and said, triumphantly, that 'his marriage with experience had not been so productive as Mr. Southey's in teaching him a knowledge of the good things of this life.' He had been to see the *Castle Spectre* by Monk Lewis, while at Bristol, and described it very well. He said 'it fitted the taste of the audience like a glove.' This *ad captandum* merit was however by no means a recommendation of it, according to the severe principles of the new school, which reject rather than court popular effect. Wordsworth, looking out of the low, latticed window, said, 'How beautifully the sun sets on that yellow bank!' I thought within myself, 'With what eyes these poets see nature!' and ever after, when I saw the sun-set stream upon the objects facing it, conceived I had made a discovery, or thanked Mr. Wordsworth for having made one for me! We went over to All-Foxden again the day following, and Wordsworth read us the story of *Peter Bell* in the open air; and the comment upon it by his face and voice was very different from that of some later critics! Whatever might be thought of the poem, 'his face was as a book where men might read strange matters,' and he announced the fate of his hero in prophetic tones. There is a *chaunt* in the recitation both of Coleridge

and Wordsworth, which acts as a spell upon the hearer, and disarms the judgment. Perhaps they have deceived themselves by making habitual use of this ambiguous accompaniment. Coleridge's manner is more full, animated, and varied; Wordsworth's more equable, sustained, and internal. The one might be termed more *dramatic*, the other more *lyrical*. Coleridge has told me that he himself liked to compose in walking over uneven ground, or breaking through the straggling branches of a copse-wood; whereas Wordsworth always wrote (if he could) walking up and down a straight gravel walk, or in some spot where the continuity of his verse met with no collateral interruption. Returning that same evening, I got into a metaphysical argument with Wordsworth, while Coleridge was explaining the different notes of the nightingale to his sister, in which we neither of us succeeded in making ourselves perfectly clear and intelligible. Thus I passed three weeks at Nether Stowey and in the neighbourhood, generally devoting the afternoons to a delightful chat in an arbour made of bark by the poet's friend Tom Poole, sitting under two fine elm-trees, and listening to the bees humming round us, while we quaffed our *flip*. It was agreed, among other things, that we should make a jaunt down the Bristol Channel, as far as Linton. We set off together on foot, Coleridge, John Chester, and I. This Chester was a native of Nether Stowey, one of those who were attracted to Coleridge's discourse as flies are to honey, or bees in swarming-time to the sound of a brass pan. He 'followed in the chase like a dog who hunts, not like one that made up the cry.' He had on a brown cloth coat, boots, and corduroy breeches, was low in stature, bow-legged, had a drag in his walk like a drover, which he assisted by a hazel switch, and kept on a sort of trot by the side of Coleridge, like a running footman by a state coach, that he might not lose a syllable or sound that fell from Coleridge's lips. He told me his private opinion,

that Coleridge was a wonderful man. He scarcely opened his lips, much less offered an opinion the whole way: yet of the three, had I to choose during that journey, I would be John Chester. He afterwards followed Coleridge into Germany, where the Kantean philosophers were puzzled how to bring him under any of their categories. When he sat down at table with his idol, John's felicity was complete; Sir Walter Scott's, or Mr. Blackwood's, when they sat down at the same table with the King, was not more so. We passed Dunster on our right, a small town between the brow of a hill and the sea. I remember eyeing it wistfully as it lay below us: contrasted with the woody scene around, it looked as clear, as pure, as *embrowned* and ideal as any landscape I have seen since, of Gaspar Poussin's or Domenichino's. We had a long day's march (our feet kept time to the echoes of Coleridge's tongue) through Minehead and by the Blue Anchor, and on to Linton, which we did not reach till near midnight, and where we had some difficulty in making a lodgment. We, however, knocked the people of the house up at last, and we were repaid for our apprehensions and fatigue by some excellent rashers of fried bacon and eggs. The view in coming along had been splendid. We walked for miles and miles on dark brown heaths overlooking the Channel, with the Welsh hills beyond, and at times descended into little sheltered valleys close by the sea-side, with a smuggler's face scowling by us, and then had to ascend conical hills with a path winding up through a coppice to a barren top, like a monk's shaven crown, from one of which I pointed out to Coleridge's notice the bare masts of a vessel on the very edge of the horizon, and within the red orbed disk of the setting sun, like his own spectre-ship in the *Ancient Mariner*. At Linton the character of the sea-coast becomes more marked and rugged. There is a place called the *Valley of Rocks* (I suspect this was only the poetical name for it), bedded among precipices overhanging the sea, with rocky caverns

beneath, into which the waves dash, and where the sea-gull for ever wheels its screaming flight. On the tops of these are huge stones thrown transverse, as if an earthquake had tossed them there, and behind these is a fretwork of perpendicular rocks, something like the *Giant's Causeway*. A thunder-storm came on while we were at the inn, and Coleridge was running out bare-headed to enjoy the commotion of the elements in the *Valley of Rocks*, but as if in spite, the clouds only muttered a few angry sounds, and let fall a few refreshing drops. Coleridge told me that he and Wordsworth were to have made this place the scene of a prose-tale, which was to have been in the manner of, but far superior to, the *Death of Abel*, but they had relinquished the design. In the morning of the second day, we breakfasted luxuriously in an old-fashioned parlour on tea, toast, eggs, and honey, in the very sight of the bee-hives from which it had been taken, and a garden full of thyme and wild flowers that had produced it. On this occasion Coleridge spoke of Virgil's *Georgics*, but not well. I do not think he had much feeling for the classical or elegant.[1] It was in this room that we found a little worn-out copy of the *Seasons*, lying in a window-seat, on which Coleridge exclaimed, '*That* is true fame!' He said Thomson was a great poet, rather than a good one; his style was as meretricious as his thoughts were natural. He spoke of Cowper as the best modern poet. He said the *Lyrical Ballads* were an experiment about to be tried by him and Wordsworth, to see how far the public taste would endure poetry written in a more natural and simple style than had hitherto been attempted; totally

[1] He had no idea of pictures, of Claude or Raphael, and at this time I had as little as he. He sometimes gives a striking account at present of the Cartoons at Pisa by Buffamalco and others; of one in particular, where Death is seen in the air brandishing his scythe, and the great and mighty of the earth shudder at his approach, while the beggars and the wretched kneel to him as their deliverer. He would, of course, understand so broad and fine a moral as this at any time.

discarding the artifices of poetical diction, and making use only of such words as had probably been common in the most ordinary language since the days of Henry II. Some comparison was introduced between Shakspeare and Milton. He said 'he hardly knew which to prefer. Shakspeare appeared to him a mere stripling in the art; he was as tall and as strong, with infinitely more activity than Milton, but he never appeared to have come to man's estate; or if he had, he would not have been a man, but a monster.' He spoke with contempt of Gray, and with intolerance of Pope. He did not like the versification of the latter. He observed that 'the ears of these couplet-writers might be charged with having short memories, that could not retain the harmony of whole passages.' He thought little of Junius as a writer; he had a dislike of Dr. Johnson; and a much higher opinion of Burke as an orator and politician, than of Fox or Pitt. He, however, thought him very inferior in richness of style and imagery to some of our elder prose-writers, particularly Jeremy Taylor. He liked Richardson, but not Fielding; nor could I get him to enter into the merits of *Caleb Williams*. In short, he was profound and discriminating with respect to those authors whom he liked, and where he gave his judgment fair play; capricious, perverse, and prejudiced in his antipathies and distastes. We loitered on the 'ribbed sea-sands,' in such talk as this a whole morning, and, I recollect, met with a curious seaweed, of which John Chester told us the country name! A fisherman gave Coleridge an account of a boy that had been drowned the day before, and that they had tried to save him at the risk of their own lives. He said 'he did not know how it was that they ventured, but, Sir, we have a *nature* towards one another.' This expression, Coleridge remarked to me, was a fine illustration of that theory of disinterestedness which I (in common with Butler) had adopted. I broached to him an argument of mine to prove that *likeness* was not mere association

of ideas. I said that the mark in the sand put one in mind of a man's foot, not because it was part of a former impression of a man's foot (for it was quite new), but because it was like the shape of a man's foot. He assented to the justness of this distinction (which I have explained at length elsewhere, for the benefit of the curious) and John Chester listened; not from any interest in the subject, but because he was astonished that I should be able to suggest anything to Coleridge that he did not already know. We returned on the third morning, and Coleridge remarked the silent cottage-smoke curling up the valleys where, a few evenings before, we had seen the lights gleaming through the dark.

In a day or two after we arrived at Stowey, we set out, I on my return home, and he for Germany. It was a Sunday morning, and he was to preach that day for Dr. Toulmin of Taunton. I asked him if he had prepared anything for the occasion? He said he had not even thought of the text, but should as soon as we parted. I did not go to hear him—this was a fault—but we met in the evening at Bridgewater. The next day we had a long day's walk to Bristol, and sat down, I recollect, by a well-side on the road, to cool ourselves and satisfy our thirst, when Coleridge repeated to me some descriptive lines of his tragedy of *Remorse*; which I must say became his mouth and that occasion better than they, some years after, did Mr. Elliston's and the Drury-lane boards—

> 'Oh memory! shield me from the world's poor strife,
> And give those scenes thine everlasting life.'

I saw no more of him for a year or two, during which period he had been wandering in the Hartz Forest, in Germany; and his return was cometary, meteorous, unlike his setting out. It was not till some time after that I knew his friends Lamb and Southey. The last always appears to me (as I first saw him) with a commonplace book under his arm, and the first with a *bon-mot* in his mouth. It was at

Godwin's that I met him with Holcroft and Coleridge, where they were disputing fiercely which was the best—*Man as he was, or man as he is to be.* 'Give me,' says Lamb, 'man as he is *not* to be.' This saying was the beginning of a friendship between us, which I believe still continues. Enough of this for the present.

'But there is matter for another rhyme,
And I to this may add a second tale.'

ESSAY II

OF PERSONS ONE WOULD WISH TO HAVE SEEN

'Come like shadows—so depart.'

Lamb it was, I think, who suggested this subject, as well as the defence of Guy Faux, which I urged him to execute. As, however, he would undertake neither, I suppose I must do both, a task for which he would have been much fitter, no less from the temerity than the felicity of his pen—

'Never so sure our rapture to create
As when it touch'd the brink of all we hate.'

Compared with him, I shall, I fear, make but a commonplace piece of business of it; but I should be loth the idea was entirely lost, and besides I may avail myself of some hints of his in the progress of it. I am sometimes, I suspect, a better reporter of the ideas of other people than expounder of my own. I pursue the one too far into paradox or mysticism; the others I am not bound to follow farther than I like, or than seems fair and reasonable.

On the question being started, Ayrton said, 'I suppose the two first persons you would choose to see would be the two greatest names in English literature, Sir Isaac Newton and Mr. Locke?' In this Ayrton, as usual, reckoned without his host. Every one burst out a laughing at the expression of Lamb's face, in which impatience was restrained by courtesy. 'Yes, the greatest names,' he stammered out hastily, 'but they were not persons—not persons.'

—'Not persons?' said Ayrton, looking wise and foolish at the same time, afraid his triumph might be premature. 'That is,' rejoined Lamb, 'not characters, you know. By Mr. Locke and Sir Isaac Newton, you mean the *Essay on the Human Understanding*, and the *Principia*, which we have to this day. Beyond their contents there is nothing personally interesting in the men. But what we want to see any one *bodily* for, is when there is something peculiar, striking in the individuals, more than we can learn from their writings, and yet are curious to know. I dare say Locke and Newton were very like Kneller's portraits of them. But who could paint Shakspeare?'—'Ay,' retorted Ayrton, 'there it is; then I suppose you would prefer seeing him and Milton instead?'—'No,' said Lamb, 'neither. I have seen so much of Shakspeare on the stage and on bookstalls, in frontispieces and on mantel-pieces, that I am quite tired of the everlasting repetition: and as to Milton's face, the impressions that have come down to us of it I do not like; it is too starched and puritanical; and I should be afraid of losing some of the manna of his poetry in the leaven of his countenance and the precisian's band and gown.'—'I shall guess no more,' said Ayrton. 'Who is it, then, you would like to see "in his habit as he lived," if you had your choice of the whole range of English literature?' Lamb then named Sir Thomas Browne and Fulke Greville, the friend of Sir Philip Sidney, as the two worthies whom he should feel the greatest pleasure to encounter on the floor of his apartment in their nightgown and slippers, and to exchange friendly greeting with them. At this Ayrton laughed outright, and conceived Lamb was jesting with him; but as no one followed his example, he thought there might be something in it, and waited for an explanation in a state of whimsical suspense. Lamb then (as well as I can remember a conversation that passed twenty years ago—how time slips!) went on as follows. 'The reason why I pitch upon these two authors is,

that their writings are riddles, and they themselves the most mysterious of personages. They resemble the soothsayers of old, who dealt in dark hints and doubtful oracles; and I should like to ask them the meaning of what no mortal but themselves, I should suppose, can fathom. There is Dr. Johnson: I have no curiosity, no strange uncertainty about him; he and Boswell together have pretty well let me into the secret of what passed through his mind. He and other writers like him are sufficiently explicit: my friends whose repose I should be tempted to disturb (were it in my power), are implicit, inextricable, inscrutable.

'When I look at that obscure but gorgeous prose composition the *Urn-burial*, I seem to myself to look into a deep abyss, at the bottom of which are hid pearls and rich treasure; or it is like a stately labyrinth of doubt and withering speculation, and I would invoke the spirit of the author to lead me through it. Besides, who would not be curious to see the lineaments of a man who, having himself been twice married, wished that mankind were propagated like trees! As to Fulke Greville, he is like nothing but one of his own "Prolognes spoken by the ghost of an old king of Ormus," a truly formidable and inviting personage: his style is apocalyptical, cabalistical, a knot worthy of such an apparition to untie; and for the unravelling a passage or two, I would stand the brunt of an encounter with so portentous a commentator!'—'I am afraid, in that case,' said Ayrton, 'that if the mystery were once cleared up, the merit might be lost'; and turning to me, whispered a friendly apprehension, that while Lamb continued to admire these old crabbed authors, he would never become a popular writer. Dr. Donne was mentioned as a writer of the same period, with a very interesting countenance, whose history was singular, and whose meaning was often quite as *uncomeatable*, without a personal citation from the dead, as that of any of his contemporaries. The volume was produced; and while

some one was expatiating on the exquisite simplicity and beauty of the portrait prefixed to the old edition, Ayrton got hold of the poetry, and exclaiming 'What have we here?' read the following:

> 'Here lies a She-Sun and a He-Moon there—
> She gives the best light to his sphear,
> Or each is both, and all, and so
> They unto one another nothing owe.'

There was no resisting this, till Lamb, seizing the volume, turned to the beautiful *Lines to his Mistress*, dissuading her from accompanying him abroad, and read them with suffused features and a faltering tongue:

> 'By our first strange and fatal interview,
> By all desires which thereof did ensue,
> By our long starving hopes, by that remorse
> Which my words' masculine perswasive force
> Begot in thee, and by the memory
> Of hurts, which spies and rivals threatned me,
> I calmely beg. But by thy father's wrath,
> By all paines which want and divorcement hath,
> I conjure thee; and all the oathes which I
> And thou have sworne to seale joynt constancy
> Here I unsweare, and overswear them thus—
> Thou shalt not love by wayes so dangerous.
> Temper, O fair love! love's impetuous rage,
> Be my true mistris still, not my faign'd Page;
> I'll goe, and, by thy kinde leave, leave behinde
> Thee! onely worthy to nurse in my minde.
> Thirst to come backe; O, if thou die before,
> My soule, from other lands to thee shall soare.
> Thy (else almighty) beauty cannot move
> Rage from the seas, nor thy love teach them love.
> Nor tame wild Boreas' harshnesse; thou hast reade
> How roughly hee in pieces shivered
> Fair Orithea, whom he swore he lov'd.
> Fall ill or good, 'tis madnesse to have prov'd
> Dangers unurg'd: Feed on this flattery,
> That absent lovers one in th' other be.
> Dissemble nothing, not a boy; nor change
> Thy bodie's habite, nor minde; be not strange
> To thyeselfe onely. All will spie in thy face
> A blushing, womanly, discovering grace.

Richly-cloath'd apes are call'd apes, and as soone
Eclips'd as bright, we call the moone the moon.
Men of France, changeable camelions,
Spittles of diseases, shops of fashions,
Love's fuellers, and the rightest company
Of players, which upon the world's stage be,
Will quickly know thee . . .
O stay here! for for thee
England is onely a worthy gallerie,
To walke in expectation; till from thence
Our greatest King call thee to his presence.
When I am gone, dreame me some happinesse,
Nor let thy lookes our long-hid love confesse,
Nor praise, nor dispraise me; nor blesse, nor curse
Openly love's force, nor in bed fright thy nurse
With midnight's startings, crying out, Oh, oh,
Nurse, oh, my love is slaine, I saw him goe
O'er the white Alpes alone; I saw him, I,
Assail'd, fight, taken, stabb'd, bleed, fall, and die.
Augure me better chance, except dread Jove
Thinke it enough for me to have had thy love.'

Some one then inquired of Lamb if we could not see from the window the Temple walk in which Chaucer used to take his exercise; and on his name being put to the vote, I was pleased to find that there was a general sensation in his favour in all but Ayrton, who said something about the ruggedness of the metre, and even objected to the quaintness of the orthography. I was vexed at this superficial gloss, pertinaciously reducing everything to its own trite level, and asked 'if he did not think it would be worth while to scan the eye that had first greeted the Muse in that dim twilight and early dawn of English literature; to see the head round which the visions of fancy must have played like gleams of inspiration or a sudden glory; to watch those lips that "lisped in numbers, for the numbers came"—as by a miracle, or as if the dumb should speak? Nor was it alone that he had been the first to tune his native tongue (however imperfectly to modern ears); but he was himself a noble, manly character, standing before his age and striving to advance it; a pleasant humourist withal, who has not only handed down to

us the living manners of his time, but had, no doubt, store of curious and quaint devices, and would make as hearty a companion as mine Host of the Tabard. His interview with Petrarch is fraught with interest. Yet I would rather have seen Chaucer in company with the author of the *Decameron*, and have heard them exchange their best stories together—the *Squire's Tale* against the Story of the *Falcon*, the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* against the *Adventures of Friar Albert*. How fine to see the high mysterious brow which learning then wore, relieved by the gay, familiar tone of men of the world, and by the courtesies of genius! Surely, the thoughts and feelings which passed through the minds of these great revivers of learning, these Cadmuses who sowed the teeth of letters, must have stamped an expression on their features as different from the moderns as their books, and well worth the perusal. Dante,' I continued, 'is as interesting a person as his own Ugolino, one whose lineaments curiosity would as eagerly devour in order to penetrate his spirit, and the only one of the Italian poets I should care much to see. There is a fine portrait of Ariosto by no less a hand than Titian's; light, Moorish, spirited, but not answering our idea. The same artist's large colossal profile of Peter Aretine is the only likeness of the kind that has the effect of conversing with "the mighty dead"; and this is truly spectral, ghastly, necromantic.' Lamb put it to me if I should like to see Spenser as well as Chaucer; and I answered, without hesitation, 'No; for that his beauties were ideal, visionary, not palpable or personal, and therefore connected with less curiosity about the man. His poetry was the essence of romance, a very halo round the bright orb of fancy; and the bringing in the individual might dissolve the charm. No tones of voice could come up to the mellifluous cadence of his verse; no form but of a winged angel could vie with the airy shapes he has described. He was (to my apprehension) rather a "creature of the element, that lived in the rainbow and played in the

plighted clouds," than an ordinary mortal. Or if he did appear, I should wish it to be as a mere vision, like one of his own pageants, and that he should pass by unquestioned like a dream or sound—

> ——"*That* was Arion crown'd:
> So went he playing on the wat'ry plain."'

Captain Burney muttered something about Columbus, and Martin Burney hinted at the Wandering Jew; but the last was set aside as spurious, and the first made over to the New World.

'I should like,' said Mrs. Reynolds, 'to have seen Pope talk with Patty Blount; and I *have* seen Goldsmith.' Every one turned round to look at Mrs. Reynolds, as if by so doing they could get a sight at Goldsmith.

'Where,' asked a harsh, croaking voice, 'was Dr. Johnson in the years 1745-6? He did not write anything that we know of, nor is there any account of him in Boswell during those two years. Was he in Scotland with the Pretender? He seems to have passed through the scenes in the Highlands in company with Boswell, many years after, "with lack-lustre eye," yet as if they were familiar to him, or associated in his mind with interests that he durst not explain. If so, it would be an additional reason for my liking him; and I would give something to have seen him seated in the tent with the youthful Majesty of Britain, and penning the Proclamation to all true subjects and adherents of the legitimate Government.'

'I thought,' said Ayrton, turning short round upon Lamb, 'that you of the Lake School did not like Pope?'—'Not like Pope! My dear sir, you must be under a mistake—I can read him over and over for ever!'—'Why, certainly, the *Essay on Man* must be allowed to be a masterpiece.'—'It may be so, but I seldom look into it.'—'Oh! then it's his Satires you admire?'—'No, not his Satires, but his friendly Epistles and his compliments.'—'Compliments! I did not know he ever made any.'—'The finest,' said

Lamb, 'that were ever paid by the wit of man. Each of them is worth an estate for life—nay, is an immortality. There is that superb one to Lord Cornbury:

> "Despise low joys, low gains;
> Disdain whatever Cornbury disdains;
> Be virtuous, and be happy for your pains."

Was there ever more artful insinuation of idolatrous praise? And then that noble apotheosis of his friend Lord Mansfield (however little deserved), when, speaking of the House of Lords, he adds:

> "Conspicuous scene! another yet is nigh,
> (More silent far) where kings and poets lie;
> Where Murray (long enough his country's pride)
> Shall be no more than Tully or than Hyde."

And with what a fine turn of indignant flattery he addresses Lord Bolingbroke:

> "Why rail they then, if but one wreath of mine,
> Oh! all accomplish'd St. John, deck thy shrine?"

Or turn,' continued Lamb, with a slight hectic on his cheek and his eye glistening, 'to his list of early friends:

> "But why then publish? Granville the polite,
> And knowing Walsh, would tell me I could write;
> Well-natured Garth inflamed with early praise,
> And Congreve loved, and Swift endured my lays:
> The courtly Talbot, Somers, Sheffield read,
> Ev'n mitred Rochester would nod the head;
> And St. John's self (great Dryden's friend before)
> Received with open arms one poet more.
> Happy my studies, if by these approved!
> Happier their author, if by these beloved!
> From these the world will judge of men and books,
> Not from the Burnets, Oldmixons, and Cooks."'

Here his voice totally failed him, and throwing down the book, he said, 'Do you think I would not wish to have been friends with such a man as this?'

'What say you to Dryden?'—'He rather made a show of himself, and courted popularity in that lowest temple of fame, a coffee-shop, so as in some measure

to vulgarise one's idea of him. Pope, on the contrary, reached the very *beau ideal* of what a poet's life should be; and his fame while living seemed to be an emanation from that which was to circle his name after death. He was so far enviable (and one would feel proud to have witnessed the rare spectacle in him) that he was almost the only poet and man of genius who met with his reward on this side of the tomb, who realised in friends, fortune, the esteem of the world, the most sanguine hopes of a youthful ambition, and who found that sort of patronage from the great during his lifetime which they would be thought anxious to bestow upon him after his death. Read Gay's verses to him on his supposed return from Greece, after his translation of Homer was finished, and say if you would not gladly join the bright procession that welcomed him home, or see it once more land at Whitehall stairs.'—'Still,' said Mrs. Reynold's, 'I would rather have seen him talking with Patty Blount, or riding by in a coronet-coach with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu!'

Erasmus Phillips, who was deep in a game of piquet at the other end of the room, whispered to Martin Burney to ask if Junius would not be a fit person to invoke from the dead. 'Yes,' said Lamb, 'provided he would agree to lay aside his mask.'

We were now at a stand for a short time, when Fielding was mentioned as a candidate; only one, however, seconded the proposition. 'Richardson?' —'By all means, but only to look at him through the glass door of his back shop, hard at work upon one of his novels (the most extraordinary contrast that ever was presented between an author and his works); not to let him come behind his counter, lest he should want you to turn customer, or to go upstairs with him, lest he should offer to read the first manuscript of Sir Charles Grandison, which was originally written in eight-and-twenty volumes octavo, or get out the letters of his female correspondents, to prove that Joseph Andrews was low.'

There was but one statesman in the whole of English history that any one expressed the least desire to see—Oliver Cromwell, with his fine, frank, rough, pimply face, and wily policy; and one enthusiast, John Bunyan, the immortal author of the *Pilgrim's Progress*. It seemed that if he came into the room, dreams would follow him, and that each person would nod under his golden cloud, 'nigh-sphered in heaven,' a canopy as strange and stately as any in Homer.

Of all persons near our own time, Garrick's name was received with the greatest enthusiasm, who was proposed by Barron Field. He presently superseded both Hogarth and Handel, who had been talked of, but then it was on condition that he should act in tragedy and comedy, in the play and the farce, *Lear* and *Wildair* and *Abel Drugger*. What a *sight for sore eyes* that would be! Who would not part with a year's income at least, almost with a year of his natural life, to be present at it? Besides, as he could not act alone, and recitations are unsatisfactory things, what a troop he must bring with him—the silver-tongued Barry, and Quin, and Shuter and Weston, and Mrs. Clive and Mrs. Pritchard, of whom I have heard my father speak as so great a favourite when he was young. This would indeed be a revival of the dead, the restoring of art; and so much the more desirable, as such is the lurking scepticism mingled with our overstrained admiration of past excellence, that though we have the speeches of Burke, the portraits of Reynolds, the writings of Goldsmith, and the conversation of Johnson, to show what people could do at that period, and to confirm the universal testimony to the merits of Garrick; yet, as it was before our time, we have our misgivings, as if he was probably, after all, little better than a Bartlemy-fair actor, dressed out to play *Macbeth* in a scarlet coat and laced cocked-hat. For one, I should like to have seen and heard with my own eyes and ears. Certainly, by all accounts, if any one was

ever moved by the true histrionic *æstus*, it was Garrick. When he followed the Ghost in *Hamlet*, he did not drop the sword, as most actors do, behind the scenes, but kept the point raised the whole way round, so fully was he possessed with the idea, or so anxious not to lose sight of his part for a moment. Once at a splendid dinner-party at Lord ——'s, they suddenly missed Garrick, and could not imagine what was become of him, till they were drawn to the window by the convulsive screams and peals of laughter of a young negro boy, who was rolling on the ground in an ecstasy of delight to see Garrick mimicking a turkey-cock in the court-yard, with his coat-tail stuck out behind, and in a seeming flutter of feathered rage and pride. Of our party only two persons present had seen the British Roscius; and they seemed as willing as the rest to renew their acquaintance with their old favourite.

We were interrupted in the hey-day and mid-career of this fanciful speculation, by a grumbler in a corner, who declared it was a shame to make all this rout about a mere player and farce-writer, to the neglect and exclusion of the fine old dramatists, the contemporaries and rivals of Shakspeare. Lamb said he had anticipated this objection when he had named the author of *Mustapha* and *Alaham*; and, out of caprice, insisted upon keeping him to represent the set, in preference to the wild, hare-brained enthusiast, Kit Marlowe; to the sexton of St. Ann's, Webster, with his melancholy yew-trees and death's-heads; to Decker, who was but a garrulous proser; to the voluminous Heywood; and even to Beaumont and Fletcher, whom we might offend by complimenting the wrong author on their joint productions. Lord Brooke, on the contrary, stood quite by himself, or, in Cowley's words, was 'a vast species alone.' Some one hinted at the circumstance of his being a lord, which rather startled Lamb, but he said a *ghost* would perhaps dispense with strict etiquette, on being regularly addressed by his title. Ben Jonson

divided our suffrages pretty equally. Some were afraid he would begin to traduce Shakspeare, who was not present to defend himself. 'If he grows disagreeable,' it was whispered aloud, 'there is Godwin can match him.' At length, his romantic visit to Drummond of Hawthornden was mentioned, and turned the scale in his favour.

Lamb inquired if there was any one that was hanged that I would choose to mention? And I answered, Eugene Aram. The name of the 'Admirable Crichton' was suddenly started as a splendid example of *waste* talents, so different from the generality of his countrymen. This choice was mightily approved by a North-Briton present, who declared himself descended from that prodigy of learning and accomplishment, and said he had family plate in his possession as vouchers for the fact, with the initials A. C.— *Admirable Chrichton!* Hunt laughed, or rather roared, as heartily at this as I should think he has done for many years.

The last named Mitre-courtier[1] then wished to know whether there were any metaphysicians to whom one might be tempted to apply the wizard spell? I replied, there were only six in modern times deserving the name—Hobbes, Berkeley, Butler, Hartley, Hume, Leibnitz; and perhaps Jonathan Edwards, a Massachusetts man.[2] As to the French, who talked fluently of having *created* this science, there was not a tittle in

[1] Lamb at this time occupied chambers in Mitre-court, Temple.

[2] Bacon is not included in this list, nor do I know where he should come in. It is not easy to make room for him and his reputation together. This great and celebrated man in some of his works recommends it to pour a bottle of claret into the ground of a morning, and to stand over it, inhaling the perfumes. So he sometimes enriched the dry and barren soil of speculation with the fine aromatic spirit of his genius. His *Essays* and his *Advancement of Learning* are works of vast depth and scope of observation. The last, though it contains no positive discoveries, is a noble chart of the human intellect, and a guide to all future inquirers.

any of their writings that was not to be found literally in the authors I had mentioned. [Horne Tooke, who might have a claim to come in under the head of Grammar, was still living.] None of these names seemed to excite much interest, and I did not plead for the re-appearance of those who might be thought best fitted by the abstracted nature of their studies for the present spiritual and disembodied state, and who, even while on this living stage, were nearly divested of common flesh and blood. As Ayrton, with an uneasy, fidgety face, was about to put some question about Mr. Locke and Dugald Stewart, he was prevented by Martin Burney, who observed, 'If J—— was here, he would undoubtedly be for having up those profound and redoubted socialists, Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus.' I said this might be fair enough in him who had read, or fancied he had read, the original works, but I did not see how we could have any right to call up these authors to give an account of themselves in person, till we had looked into their writings.

By this time it should seem that some rumour of our whimsical deliberation had got wind, and had disturbed the *irritable genus* in their shadowy abodes, for we received messages from several candidates that we had just been thinking of. Gray declined our invitation, though he had not yet been asked: Gay offered to come, and bring in his hand the Duchess of Bolton, the original Polly: Steele and Addison left their cards as Captain Sentry and Sir Roger de Coverley: Swift came in and sat down without speaking a word, and quitted the room as abruptly: Otway and Chatterton were seen lingering on the opposite side of the Styx, but could not muster enough between them to pay Charon his fare: Thomson fell asleep in the boat, and was rowed back again; and Burns sent a low fellow, one John Barleycorn, an old companion of his, who had conducted him to the other world, to say that he had during his lifetime been drawn out of his retirement as a show, only to be made an excise-

man of, and that he would rather remain where he was. He desired, however, to shake hands by his representative—the hand, thus held out, was in a burning fever, and shook prodigiously.

The room was hung round with several portraits of eminent painters. While we were debating whether we should demand speech with these masters of mute eloquence, whose features were so familiar to us, it seemed that all at once they glided from their frames, and seated themselves at some little distance from us. There was Leonardo, with his majestic beard and watchful eye, having a bust of Archimedes before him; next him was Raphael's graceful head turned round to the Fornarina; and on his other side was Lucretia Borgia, with calm, golden locks; Michael Angelo had placed the model of St. Peter's on the table before him; Correggio had an angel at his side; Titian was seated with his mistress between himself and Giorgione; Guido was accompanied by his own Aurora, who took a dice-box from him; Claude held a mirror in his hand; Rubens patted a beautiful panther (led in by a satyr) on the head; Vandyke appeared as his own Paris, and Rembrandt was hid under firs, gold chains, and jewels, which Sir Joshua eyed closely, holding his hand so as to shade his forehead. Not a word was spoken; and as we rose to do them homage, they still presented the same surface to the view. Not being *bonâ-fide* representations of living people, we got rid of the splendid apparitions by signs and dumb show. As soon as they had melted into thin air, there was a loud noise at the outer door, and we found it was Giotto, Cimabue, and Ghirlandaio, who had been raised from the dead by their earnest desire to see their illustrious successors—

> 'Whose names on earth
> In Fame's eternal records live for aye!'

Finding them gone, they had no ambition to be seen after them, and mournfully withdrew. 'Egad!' said Lamb, 'these are the very fellows I should like to

have had some talk with, to know how they could see to paint when all was dark around them.'

'But shall we have nothing to say,' interrogated G. J——, 'to the *Legend of Good Women*?'—'Name, name, Mr. J——,' cried Hunt in a boisterous tone of friendly exultation, 'name as many as you please, without reserve or fear of molestation!' J—— was perplexed between so many amiable recollections, that the name of the lady of his choice expired in a pensive whiff of his pipe; and Lamb impatiently declared for the Duchess of Newcastle. Mrs. Hutchinson was no sooner mentioned, than she carried the day from the Duchess. We were the less solicitous on this subject of filling up the posthumous lists of Good Women, as there was already one in the room as good, as sensible, and in all respects as exemplary, as the best of them could be for their lives! 'I should like vastly to have seen Ninon de l'Enclos,' said that incomparable person; and this immediately put us in mind that we had neglected to pay honour due to our friends on the other side of the Channel: Voltaire, the patriarch of levity, and Rousseau, the father of sentiment; Montaigne and Rabelais (great in wisdom and in wit); Molière and that illustrious group that are collected round him (in the print of that subject) to hear him read his comedy of the *Tartuffe* at the house of Ninon; Racine, La Fontaine, Rochefoucalt, St. Evremont, etc.

'There is one person,' said a shrill, querulous voice, 'I would rather see than all these—Don Quixote!'

'Come, come!' said Hunt; 'I thought we should have no heroes, real or fabulous. What say you, Mr. Lamb? Are you for eking out your shadowy list with such names as Alexander, Julius Cæsar, Tamerlane, or Ghengis Khan?'—'Excuse me,' said Lamb; 'on the subject of characters in active life, plotters and disturbers of the world, I have a crotchet of my own, which I beg leave to reserve.'—'No, no! come, out with your worthies!'—'What do you think of Guy

Fawkes and Judas Iscariot?' Hunt turned an eye upon him like a wild Indian, but cordial and full of smothered glee. 'Your most exquisite reason!' was echoed on all sides; and Ayrton thought that Lamb had now fairly entangled himself. 'Why I cannot but think,' retorted he of the wistful countenance, 'that Guy Fawkes, that poor, fluttering annual scarecrow of straw and rags, is an ill-used gentleman. I would give something to see him sitting pale and emaciated, surrounded by his matches and his barrels of gunpowder, and expecting the moment that was to transport him to Paradise for his heroic self-devotion; but if I say any more, there is that fellow Godwin will make something of it. And as to Judas Iscariot, my reason is different. I would fain see the face of him who, having dipped his hand in the same dish with the Son of Man, could afterwards betray him. I have no conception of such a thing; nor have I ever seen any picture (not even Leonardo's very fine one) that gave me the least idea of it.'—'You have said enough, Mr. Lamb, to justify your choice.'

'Oh! ever right, Menenius—ever right!'

'There is only one other person I can ever think of after this,' continued Lamb; but without mentioning a name that once put on a semblance of mortality. 'If Shakspeare was to come into the room, we should all rise up to meet him; but if that person was to come into it, we should all fall down and try to kiss the hem of his garment!'

As a lady present seemed now to get uneasy at the turn the conversation had taken, we rose up to go. The morning broke with that dim, dubious light by which Giotto, Cimabue, and Ghirlandaio must have seen to paint their earliest works; and we parted to meet again and renew similar topics at night, the next night, and the night after that, till that night overspread Europe which saw no dawn. The same event, in truth, broke up our little Congress that broke up the great one. But that was to meet again: our deliberations have never been resumed.

ESSAY III

ON PARTY SPIRIT

Party spirit is one of the *profoundnesses of Satan,* or, in modern language, one of the dexterous *equivoques* and contrivances of our self-love, to prove that we, and those who agree with us, combine all that is excellent and praiseworthy in our own persons (as in a ring-fence), and that all the vices and deformity of human nature take refuge with those who differ from us. It is extending and fortifying the principle of the *amour-propre,* by calling to its aid the *esprit de corps,* and screening and surrounding our favourite propensities and obstinate caprices in the hollow squares or dense phalanxes of sects and parties. This is a happy mode of pampering our self-complacency, and persuading ourselves that we, and those that side with us, are 'the salt of the earth'; of giving vent to the morbid humours of our pride, envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, those natural secretions of the human heart, under the pretext of self-defence, the public safety, or a voice from heaven, as it may happen; and of heaping every excellence into one scale, and throwing all the obloquy and contempt into the other, in virtue of a nickname, a watchword of party, a badge, the colour of a ribbon, the cut of a dress. We thus desolate the globe, or tear a country in pieces, to show that we are the only people fit to live in it; and fancy ourselves angels, while we are playing the devil. In this manner the Huron devours the Iroquois, because he is an Iroquois; and the Iroquois the Huron, for a similar reason: neither suspects that he does it because he himself is a savage, and no

better than a wild beast; and is convinced in his own breast that the difference of man and tribe makes a total difference in the case. The Papist persecutes the Protestant, the Protestant persecutes the Papist in his turn; and each fancies that he has a plenary right to do so, while he keeps in view only the offensive epithet which 'cuts the common link of brotherhood between them.' The Church of England ill-treated the Dissenters, and the Dissenters, when they had the opportunity, did not spare the Church of England. The Whig calls the Tory a knave, the Tory compliments the Whig with the same title, and each thinks the abuse sticks to the party-name, and has nothing to do with himself or the generic name of *man*. On the contrary, it cuts both ways; but while the Whigs say 'The Tory is a knave, because he is a Tory,' this is as much as to say, 'I cannot be a knave, because I am a Whig'; and by exaggerating the profligacy of his opponent, he imagines he is laying the sure foundation, and raising the lofty superstructure, of his own praises. But if he says, which is the truth, 'The Tory is not a rascal, because he is a Tory, but because human nature in power, and with the temptation, is a rascal,' then this would imply that the seeds of depravity are sown in his own bosom, and might shoot out into full growth and luxuriance if he got into place, and this he does not wish to develop till he *does* get into place.

We may be intolerant even in advocating the cause of toleration, and so bent on making proselytes to freethinking as to allow no one to think freely but ourselves. The most boundless liberality in appearance may amount in reality to the most monstrous ostracism of opinion—not condemning this or that tenet, or standing up for this or that sect or party, but in a supercilious superiority to all sects and parties alike, and proscribing in one sweeping clause, all arts, sciences, opinions, and pursuits but our own. Till the time of Locke and Toland a general toleration was never dreamt of: it was thought right on all hands

to punish and discountenance heretics and schismatics, but each party alternately claimed to be true Christians and Orthodox believers. Daniel De Foe, who spent his whole life, and wasted his strength, in asserting the right of the Dissenters to a Toleration (and got nothing for his pains but the pillory), was scandalised at the proposal of the general principle, and was equally strenuous in excluding Quakers, Anabaptists, Socinians, Sceptics, and all who did not agree in the *essentials* of Christianity—that is, who did not agree with him—from the benefit of such an indulgence to tender consciences. We wonder at the cruelties formerly practised upon the Jews: is there anything wonderful in it? They were at that time the only people to make a butt and a bugbear of, to set up as a mark of indignity, and as a foil to our self-love, for the *feræ naturæ* principle that is within us, and always craving its prey to run down, to worry and make sport of at discretion, and without mercy—the unvarying uniformity and implicit faith of the Catholic Church had imposed silence, and put a curb on our jarring dissensions, heartburnings, and ill-blood, so that we had no pretence for quarrelling among ourselves for the glory of God or the salvation of men :—a Jordanus Bruno, an Atheist or sorcerer, once in a way, would hardly suffice to stay the stomach of our theological rancour ; we therefore fell with might and main upon the Jews as a *forlorn hope* in this dearth of objects of spite or zeal ; or when the whole of Europe was reconciled to the bosom of holy Mother Church, went to the Holy Land in search of a difference of opinion, and a ground of mortal offence : but no sooner was there a division of the Christian World, than Papist fell on Protestants or Schismatics, and Schismatics upon one another, with the same loving fury as they had before fallen upon Turks and Jews. The disposition is always there, like a muzzled mastiff; the pretext only is wanting ; and this is furnished by a name, which, as soon as it is affixed to different sects or parties, gives us a licence, we think,

to let loose upon them all our malevolence, domineering humour, love of power, and wanton mischief, as if they were of different species. The sentiment of the pious English Bishop was good, who, on seeing a criminal led to execution, exclaimed, 'There goes my wicked self!'

If we look at common patriotism, it will furnish an illustration of party spirit. One would think by an Englishman's hatred of the French, and his readiness to die fighting with and for his countrymen, that all the nation were united as one man, in heart and hand —and so they are in war-time and as an exercise of their loyalty and courage: but let the crisis be over, and they cool wonderfully; begin to feel the distinctions of English, Irish, and Scotch; fall out among themselves upon some minor distinction; the same hand that was eager to shed the blood of a Frenchman, will not give a crust of bread or a cup of cold water to a fellow countryman in distress; and the heroes who defended the 'wooden walls of old England' are left to expose their wounds and crippled limbs to gain a pittance from the passengers, or to perish of hunger, cold, and neglect, in our highways. Such is the effect of our boasted nationality: it is active, fierce in doing mischief; dormantly lukewarm in doing good. We may also see why the greatest stress is laid on trifles in religion, and why the most violent animosities arise out of the smallest differences, either in this or in politics.

In the first place, it would never do to establish our superiority over others by the acquisition of greater virtues, or by discarding our vices; but it is charming to do this by merely repeating a different formula of prayer, turning to the east instead of the west. He should fight boldly for such a distinction, who is persuaded it will furnish him a passport to the other world, and entitle him to look down on the rest of his fellows as *given over to perdition*. Secondly, we often hate those most with whom we have only a slight shade of difference, whether in politics or

religion; because as the whole is a contest for precedence and infallibility, we find it more difficult to draw the line of distinction where so many points are conceded, and are staggered in our conviction by the arguments of those whom we cannot despise as totally and incorrigibly in the wrong. The High Church party in Queen Anne's time were disposed to sacrifice the Low Church and Dissenters to the Papists, because they were more galled by their arguments and disconcerted with their pretensions. In private life the reverse of the foregoing holds good: that is, trades and professions present a direct contrast to sects and parties. A conformity in sentiment strengthens our party and opinion, but those who have a similarity of pursuit, are rivals in interest; and hence the old maxim, that *two of a trade can never agree.*

1830.

ESSAY IV

ON THE FEELING OF IMMORTALITY IN YOUTH

No young man believes he shall ever die. It was a saying of my brother's, and a fine one. There is a feeling of Eternity in youth which makes us amends for everything. To be young is to be as one of the Immortals. One half of time indeed is spent—the other half remains in store for us with all its countless treasures, for there is no line drawn, and we see no limit to our hopes and wishes. We make the coming age our own—

'The vast, the unbounded prospect lies before us.'

Death, old age, are words without a meaning, a dream, a fiction, with which we have nothing to do. Others may have undergone, or may still undergo them—we 'bear a charmed life,' which laughs to scorn all such idle fancies. As, in setting out on a delightful journey, we strain our eager sight forward,

'Bidding the lovely scenes at distance hail,'

and see no end to prospect after prospect, new objects presenting themselves as we advance, so in the outset of life we see no end to our desires nor to the opportunities of gratifying them. We have as yet found no obstacle, no disposition to flag, and it seems that we can go on so for ever. We look round in a new world, full of life and motion, and ceaseless progress, and feel in ourselves all the vigour and spirit to keep pace with it, and do not foresee from any present signs how we shall be left behind in the race,

decline into old age, and drop into the grave. It is the simplicity and, as it were, abstractedness of our feelings in youth that (so to speak) identifies us with nature and (our experience being weak and our passions strong) makes us fancy ourselves immortal like it. Our short-lived connection with being, we fondly flatter ourselves, is an indissoluble and lasting union. As infants smile and sleep, we are rocked in the cradle of our desires, and hushed into fancied security by the roar of the universe around us—we quaff the cup of life with eager thirst without draining it, and joy and hope seem ever mantling to the brim—objects press around us, filling the mind with their magnitude and with the throng of desires that wait upon them, so that there is no room for the thoughts of death. We are too much dazzled by the gorgeousness and novelty of the bright waking dream about us to discern the dim shadow lingering for us in the distance. Nor would the hold that life has taken of us permit us to detach our thoughts that way, even if we could. We are too much absorbed in present objects and pursuits. While the spirit of youth remains unimpaired, ere 'the wine of life is drunk,' we are like people intoxicated or in a fever, who are hurried away by the violence of their own sensations: it is only as present objects begin to pall upon the sense, as we have been disappointed in our favourite pursuits, cut off from our closest ties, that we by degrees become weaned from the world, that passion loosens its hold upon futurity, and that we begin to contemplate as in a glass darkly the possibility of parting with it for good. Till then, the example of others has no effect upon us. Casualties we avoid; the slow approaches of age we play at *hide and seek* with. Like the foolish fat scullion in Sterne, who hears that Master Bobby is dead, our only reflection is, 'So am not I!' The idea of death, instead of staggering our confidence, only seems to strengthen and enhance our sense of the possession and enjoyment of life. Others may fall around us like leaves,

or be mowed down by the scythe of Time like grass: these are but metaphors to the unreflecting, buoyant ears and overweening presumption of youth. It is not till we see the flowers of Love, Hope, and Joy withering around us, that we give up the flattering delusions that before led us on, and that the emptiness and dreariness of the prospect before us reconciles us hypothetically to the silence of the grave.

Life is indeed a strange gift, and its privileges are most mysterious. No wonder when it is first granted to us, that our gratitude, our admiration, and our delight should prevent us from reflecting on our own nothingness, or from thinking it will ever be recalled. Our first and strongest impressions are borrowed from the mighty scene that is opened to us, and we unconsciously transfer its durability as well as its splendour to ourselves. So newly found, we cannot think of parting with it yet, or at least put off that consideration *sine die*. Like a rustic at a fair, we are full of amazement and rapture, and have no thought of going home, or that it will soon be night. We know our existence only by ourselves, and confound our knowledge with the objects of it. We and Nature are therefore one. Otherwise the illusion, the 'feast of reason and the flow of soul,' to which we are invited, is a mockery and a cruel insult. We do not go from a play till the last act is ended, and the lights are about to be extinguished. But the fairy face of Nature still shines on: shall we be called away before the curtain falls, or ere we have scarce had a glimpse of what is going on? Like children, our step-mother Nature holds us up to see the raree-show of the universe, and then, as if we were a burden to her to support, lets us fall down again. Yet what brave sublunary things does not this pageant present, like a ball or *fête* of the universe!

To see the golden sun, the azure sky, the outstretched ocean; to walk upon the green earth, and be lord of a thousand creatures; to look down yawning precipices or over distant sunny vales; to see the

world spread out under one's feet on a map; to bring the stars near; to view the smallest insects through a microscope; to read history, and consider the revolutions of empire and the successions of generations; to hear of the glory of Tyre, of Sidon, of Babylon, and of Susa, and to say all these were before me and are now nothing; to say I exist in such a point of time, and in such a point of space; to be a spectator and a part of its ever-moving scene; to witness the change of season, of spring and autumn, of winter and summer; to feel hot and cold, pleasure and pain, beauty and deformity, right and wrong; to be sensible to the accidents of nature; to consider the mighty world of eye and ear; to listen to the stock-dove's notes amid the forest deep; to journey over moor and mountain; to hear the midnight sainted choir; to visit lighted halls, or the cathedral's gloom, or sit in crowded theatres and see life itself mocked; to study the works of art and refine the sense of beauty to agony; to worship fame, and to dream of immortality; to look upon the Vatican, and to read Shakspeare; to gather up the wisdom of the ancients, and to pry into the future; to listen to the trump of war, the shout of victory; to question history as to the movements of the human heart; to seek for truth; to plead the cause of humanity; to overlook the world as if time and nature poured their treasures at our feet—to be and to do all this, and then in a moment to be nothing—to have it all snatched from us as by a juggler's trick, or a phantasmagoria! There is something in this transition from all to nothing that shocks us and damps the enthusiasm of youth new flushed with hope and pleasure, and we cast the comfortless thought as far from us as we can. In the first enjoyment of the state of life we discard the fear of debts and duns, and never think of the final payment of our great debt to Nature. Art we know is long; life, we flatter ourselves, should be so too. We see no end of the difficulties and delays we have to encounter: perfection is slow of attainment,

and we must have time to accomplish it in. The fame of the great names we look up to is immortal: and shall not we who contemplate it imbibe a portion of ethereal fire, the *divinæ particula auræ*, which nothing can extinguish? A wrinkle in Rembrandt or in Nature takes whole days to resolve itself into its component parts, its softenings and its sharpnesses; we refine upon our perfections, and unfold the intricacies of nature. What a prospect for the future! What a task have we not begun! And shall we be arrested in the middle of it? We do not count our time thus employed lost, or our pains thrown away; we do not flag or grow tired, but gain new vigour at our endless task. Shall Time, then, grudge us to finish what we have begun, and have formed a compact with Nature to do? Why not fill up the blank that is left us in this manner? I have looked for hours at a Rembrandt without being conscious of the flight of time, but with ever new wonder and delight, have thought that not only my own but another existence I could pass in the same manner. This rarefied, refined existence seemed to have no end, nor stint, nor principle of decay in it. The print would remain long after I who looked on it had become the prey of worms. The thing seems in itself out of all reason: health, strength, appetite are opposed to the idea of death, and we are not ready to credit it till we have found our illusions vanished, and our hopes grown cold. Objects in youth, from novelty, etc., are stamped upon the brain with such force and integrity that one thinks nothing can remove or obliterate them. They are riveted there, and appear to us as an element of our nature. It must be a mere violence that destroys them, not a natural decay. In the very strength of this persuasion we seem to enjoy an age by anticipation. We melt down years into a single moment of intense sympathy, and by anticipating the fruits defy the ravages of time. If, then, a single moment of our lives is worth years, shall we set any limits to its total value and extent? Again, does it

not happen that so secure do we think ourselves of an indefinite period of existence, that at times, when left to ourselves, and impatient of novelty, we feel annoyed at what seems to us the slow and creeping progress of time, and argue that if it always moves at this tedious snail's pace it will never come to an end? How ready are we to sacrifice any space of time which separates us from a favourite object, little thinking that before long we shall find it move too fast.

For my part, I started in life with the French Revolution, and I have lived, alas! to see the end of it. But I did not foresee this result. My sun arose with the first dawn of liberty, and I did not think how soon both must set. The new impulse to ardour given to men's minds imparted a congenial warmth and glow to mine; we were strong to run a race together, and I little dreamed that long before mine was set, the sun of liberty would turn to blood, or set once more in the night of despotism. Since then, I confess, I have no longer felt myself young, for with that my hopes fell.

I have since turned my thoughts to gathering up some of the fragments of my early recollections, and putting them into a form to which I might occasionally revert. The future was barred to my progress, and I turned for consolation and encouragement to the past. It is thus that, while we find our personal and substantial identity vanishing from us, we strive to gain a reflected and vicarious one in our thoughts: we do not like to perish wholly, and wish to bequeath our names, at least, to posterity. As long as we can make our cherished thoughts and nearest interests live in the minds of others, we do not appear to have retired altogether from the stage. We still occupy the breasts of others, and exert an influence and power over them, and it is only our bodies that are reduced to dust and powder. Our favourite speculations still find encouragement, and we make as great a figure in the eye of the world, or perhaps a greater,

than in our lifetime. The demands of our self-love are thus satisfied, and these are the most imperious and unremitting. Besides, if by our intellectual superiority we survive ourselves in this world, by our virtues and faith we may attain an interest in another, and a higher state of being, and may thus be recipients at the same time of men and of angels.

> 'E'en from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,
> E'en in our ashes live their wonted fires.'

As we grow old, our sense of the value of time becomes vivid. Nothing else, indeed, seems of any consequence. We can never cease wondering that that which has ever been should cease to be. We find many things remain the same: why then should there be change in us. This adds a convulsive grasp of whatever is, a sense of a fallacious hollowness in all we see. Instead of the full, pulpy feeling of youth tasting existence and every object in it, all is flat and vapid,—a whited sepulchre, fair without but full of ravening and all uncleanness within. The world is a witch that puts us off with false shows and appearances. The simplicity of youth, the confiding expectation, the boundless raptures, are gone: we only think of getting out of it as well as we can, and without any great mischance or annoyance. The flush of illusion, even the complacent retrospect of past joys and hopes, is over: if we can slip out of life without indignity, can escape with little bodily infirmity, and frame our minds to the calm and respectable composure of *still-life* before we return to physical nothingness, it is as much as we can expect. We do not die wholly at our deaths: we have mouldered away gradually long before. Faculty after faculty, interest after interest, attachment after attachment disappear: we are torn from ourselves while living, year after year sees us no longer the same, and death only consigns the last fragment of what we were to the grave. That we should wear out by slow stages, and dwindle at last into nothing,

is not wonderful, when even in our prime our strongest impressions leave little trace but for the moment, and we are the creatures of petty circumstance. How little effect is made on us in our best days by the books we have read, the scenes we have witnessed, the sensations we have gone through! Think only of the feelings we experience in reading a fine romance (one of Sir Walter's, for instance); what beauty, what sublimity, what interest, what heart-rending emotions! You would suppose the feelings you then experienced would last for ever, or subdue the mind to their own harmony and tone: while we are reading it seems as if nothing could ever put us out of our way, or trouble us:—the first splash of mud that we get on entering the street, the first twopence we are cheated out of, the feeling vanishes clean out of our minds, and we become the prey of petty and annoying circumstance. The mind soars to the lofty: it is at home in the grovelling, the disagreeable, and the little. And yet we wonder that age should be feeble and querulous,—that the freshness of youth should fade away. Both worlds would hardly satisfy the extravagance of our desires and of our presumption.

ESSAY V

ON PUBLIC OPINION

'Scared at the sound itself has made.'

Once asking a friend why he did not bring forward an explanation of a circumstance, in which his conduct had been called in question, he said, 'His friends were satisfied on the subject, and he cared very little about the opinion of the world.' I made answer that I did not consider this a good ground to rest his defence upon, for that a man's friends seldom thought better of him than the world did. I see no reason to alter this opinion. Our friends, indeed, are more apt than a mere stranger to join in with, or be silent under any imputation thrown out against us, because they are apprehensive they may be indirectly implicated in it, and they are bound to betray us to save their own credit. To judge of our jealousy, our sensibility, our high notions of responsibility, on this score, only consider if a single individual lets fall a solitary remark implying a doubt of the wit, the sense, the courage of a friend—how it staggers us—how it makes us shake with fear—how it makes us call up all our eloquence and airs of self-consequence in his defence, lest our partiality should be supposed to have blinded our perceptions, and we should be regarded as the dupes of a mistaken admiration. We already begin to meditate an escape from a losing cause, and try to find out some other fault in the character under discussion, to show that we are not behind-hand (if the truth must be spoken) in sagacity, and a sense of the ridiculous. If, then, this is the

case with the first flaw, the first doubt, the first speck that dims the sun of friendship, so that we are ready to turn our backs on our sworn attachments and well-known professions the instant we have not all the world with us, what must it be when we have all the world against us; when our friend, instead of a single stain, is covered with mud from head to foot; how shall we expect our feeble voices not to be drowned in the general clamour? how shall we dare to oppose our partial and mis-timed suffrages to the just indignation of the public? Or if it should not amount to this, how shall we answer the silence and contempt with which his name is received. How shall we animate the great mass of indifference or distrust with our private enthusiasm? how defeat the involuntary smile, or the suppressed sneer, with the burst of generous feeling and the glow of honest conviction? It is a thing not to be thought of, unless we would enter into a crusade against prejudice and malignity, devote ourselves as martyrs to friendship, raise a controversy in every company we go into, quarrel with every person we meet, and after making ourselves and every one else uncomfortable, leave off, not by clearing our friend's reputation, but by involving our own pretensions to decency and common sense. People will not fail to observe that a man may have his reasons for his faults or vices; but that for another to volunteer a defence of them, is without excuse. It is, in fact, an attempt to deprive them of the great and only benefit they derive from the supposed errors of their neighbours and contemporaries—the pleasure of backbiting and railing at them, which they call *seeing justice done*. It is not a single breath of rumour or opinion; but the whole atmosphere is infected with a sort of aguish taint of anger and suspicion, that relaxes the nerves of fidelity, and makes our most sanguine resolutions sicken and turn pale; and he who is proof against it, must either be armed with a love of truth, or a contempt for mankind, which places him out of the reach of ordinary

rules and calculations. For myself, I do not shrink from defending a cause or a friend *under a cloud*; though in neither case will cheap or common efforts suffice. But, in the first, you merely stand up for your own judgment and principles against fashion and prejudice, and thus assume a sort of manly and heroic attitude of defiance: in the last (which makes it a matter of greater nicety and nervous sensibility), you sneak behind another to throw your gauntlet at the whole world, and it requires a double stock of stoical firmness not to be laughed out of your boasted zeal and independence as a romantic and *amiable weakness*.[1]

There is nothing in which all the world agree but in running down some obnoxious individual. It may be supposed that this is not for nothing, and that they have good reasons for what they do. On the contrary, I will undertake to say, that so far from there being invariably just grounds for such an universal outcry, the universality of the outcry is often the only ground of the opinion; and that it is purposely raised upon this principle, that all other proof or evidence against the person meant to be run down is wanting. Nay, further, it may happen, that while the clamour is at the loudest; while you hear it from all quarters; while it blows a perfect hurricane; while 'the world rings with the vain stir'—not one of those who are most eager in hearing and echoing knows what it is about, or is not fully persuaded that the charge is equally false, malicious, and absurd. It is like the wind, that 'no man knoweth whence it cometh, or whither it goeth.' It is *vox et præterea nihil*. What, then, is it that gives it its confident circulation and its irresistible force. It is the loud-

[1] The only friends whom we defend with zeal and obstinacy are our relations. They seem part of ourselves. For our other friends we are only answerable, so long as we countenance them; and therefore cut the connection as soon as possible. But who ever willingly gave up the good dispositions of a child or the honour of a parent?

ness of the organ with which it is pronounced, the stentorian lungs of the multitude; the number of voices that take it up and repeat it, because others have done so; the rapid flight and the impalpable nature of common fame, that makes it a desperate undertaking for any individual to inquire into or arrest the mischief that, in the deafening buzz or loosened roar of laughter or indignation, renders it impossible for the still small voice of reason to be heard, and leaves no other course to honesty or prudence than to fall flat on the face before it, as before the pestilential blast of the desert, and wait till it has passed over. Thus every one joins in asserting, propagating, and in outwardly approving what every one, in his private and unbiassed judgment, believes and knows to be scandalous and untrue. For every one in such circumstances keeps his own opinion to himself, and only attends to or acts upon that which he conceives to be the opinion of every one but himself. So that public opinion is not seldom a farce, equal to any acted upon the stage. Not only is it spurious and hollow in the way that Mr. Locke points out, by one man's taking up at second hand the opinion of another, but worse than this, one man takes up what he believes another *will* think, and which the latter professes only because he believes it held by the first! All, therefore, that is necessary to control public opinion, is to gain possession of some organ loud and lofty enough to make yourself heard, that has power and interest on its side; and then, no sooner do you blow a blast in this trump of *ill-fame*, like the horn hung up on an old castle-wall, than you are answered, echoed, and accredited on all sides: the gates are thrown open to receive you, and you are admitted into the very heart of the fortress of public opinion, and can assail from the ramparts with every engine of abuse, and with privileged impunity, all those who may come forward to vindicate the truth, or to rescue their good name from the unprincipled keeping of authority, servility, sophistry,

and venal falsehood! The only thing wanted is to give an alarm—to excite a panic in the public mind of being left *in the lurch*, and the rabble (whether in the ranks of literature or war) will throw away their arms, and surrender at discretion to any bully or impostor who, for a *consideration*, shall choose to try the experiment upon them!

What I have here described is the effect even upon the candid and well-disposed: what must it be to the malicious and idle, who are eager to believe all the ill they can hear of every one; or to the prejudiced and interested, who are determined to credit all the ill they hear against those who are not of their own side? To these last it is only requisite to be understood that the butt of ridicule or slander is of an opposite party, and they presently give you *carte blanche* to say what you please of him. Do they know that it is true? No; but they believe what all the world says, till they have evidence to the contrary. Do you prove that it is false? They dare say, that if not that something worse remains behind; and they retain the same opinion as before, for the honour of their party. They hire some one to pelt you with mud, and then affect to avoid you in the street as a dirty fellow. They are told that you have a hump on your back, and then wonder at your assurance or want of complaisance in walking into a room where they are, without it. Instead of apologising for the mistake, and, from finding one aspersion false, doubting all the rest, they are only the more confirmed in the remainder from being deprived of one handle against you, and resent their disappointment, instead of being ashamed of their credulity. People talk of the bigotry of the Catholics, and treat with contempt the absurd claim of the Popes to infallibility—I think with little right to do so. Walk into a church in Paris, you are struck with a number of idle forms and ceremonies, the chanting of the service in Latin, the shifting of the surplices, the sprinkling of holy water, the painted windows 'cast-

ing a dim religious light,' the wax tapers, the pealing organ : the common people seem attentive and devout, and to put entire faith in all this—Why? Because they imagine others to do so ; they see and hear certain signs and supposed evidences of it, and it amuses and fills up the void of the mind, the love of the mysterious and wonderful, to lend their assent to it. They have assuredly, in general, no better reason —all our Protestant divines will tell you so. Well, step out of the church of St. Roche, and drop into an English reading-room hard by : what are you the better? You see a dozen or score of your countrymen with their faces fixed, and their eyes glued to a newspaper, a magazine, a review—reading, swallowing, profoundly ruminating on the lie, the cant, the sophism of the day! Why? It saves them the trouble of thinking ; it gratifies their ill-humour, and keeps off *ennui*! Does a gleam of doubt, an air of ridicule, or a glance of impatience pass across their features at the shallow and monstrous things they find? No, it is all passive faith and dull security ; they cannot take their eyes from the page, they cannot live without it. They believe in their adopted oracle (you see it in their faces) as implicitly as in Sir John Barleycorn, as in a sirloin of beef, as in quarter-day—as they hope to receive their rents, or to see Old England again! Are not the Popes, the Fathers, the Councils, as good as their oracles and champions? They know the paper before them to be a hoax, but do they believe in the ribaldry, the calumny, the less on that account? They believe the more in it, because it is got up solely and expressly to serve a cause that needs such support—and they swear by whatever is devoted to this object. .

The greater the profligacy, the effrontery, the servility, the greater the faith. Strange! That the British public, whether at home or abroad, should shake their heads at the Lady of Loretto, and repose deliciously on Mr. Theodore Hook. It may well be thought that the enlightened part of the British

public, persons of family and fortunes, who have had a college education, and received the benefit of foreign travel, see through the quackery, which they encourage for a political purpose, without being themselves the dupes of it. This scarcely mends the matter. Suppose an individual, of whom it has been repeatedly asserted that he has warts on his nose, were to enter the reading-room aforesaid, is there a single red-faced country squire who would not be surprised at not finding this story true, would not persuade himself five minutes after that he could not have seen correctly, or that some art had been used to conceal the defects, or would be led to doubt, from this instance, the general candour and veracity of his oracle? He would disbelieve his own senses rather. Seeing is believing, it is said: lying is believing, I say. We do not even see with our own eyes, but must 'wink and shut our apprehension up,' that we may be able to agree to the report of others, as a piece of good manners and a point of established etiquette. Besides, the supposed deformity answered his wishes, the abuse fed fat the ancient grudge he owed some presumptuous scribbler, for not agreeing in a number of points with his betters: it gave him a personal advantage over a man he did not like—and who will give up what tends to strengthen his aversion for another? To Tory prejudice, dire as it is—to English imagination, morbid as it is, a nickname, a ludicrous epithet, a malignant falsehood, when it has been once propagated and taken to the bosom as a welcome consolation, becomes a precious property, a vested right; and people would as soon give up a sinecure, or a share in a close borough, as this sort of plenary indulgence to speak and think with contempt of those who would abolish the one, or throw open the other. Party-spirit is the best reason in the world for personal antipathy and vulgar abuse.

'But, do you not think, Sir' (some dialectician may ask), 'that belief is involuntary, and that we judge in

all cases according to the precise degree of evidence and the positive facts before us?'

No, Sir.

'You believe, then, in the doctrine of philosophical free-will?'

Indeed, Sir, I do not.

'How then, Sir, am I to understand so unaccountable a diversity of opinion from the most approved writers on the philosophy of the human mind?'

May I ask, my dear Sir, did you ever read Mr. Wordsworth's poem of *Michael*?

'I cannot charge my memory with the fact.'

Well, Sir, this Michael is an old shepherd, who has a son who goes to sea, and who turns out a great reprobate, by all the accounts received of him. Before he went, however, the father took the boy with him into a mountain-glen, and made him lay the first stone of a sheep-fold, which was to be a covenant and a remembrance between them if anything ill happened. For years after, the old man used to go and work at the sheep-fold—

> 'Among the rocks
> He went, and still look'd up upon the sun,
> And listen'd to the wind,'

and sat by the half-finished work, expecting the lad's return, or hoping to hear some better tidings of him. Was this hope founded on reason—or was it not owing to the strength of affection, which in spite of everything could not relinquish its hold of a favourite object, indeed the only one that bound it to existence?

Not being able to make my dialectician answer kindly to interrogatories, I must get on without him. In matters of absolute demonstration and speculative indifferences, I grant, that belief is involuntary, and the proof not to be resisted; but then, in such matters, there is no difference of opinion, or the difference is adjusted amicably and rationally. Hobbes is of opinion, that if their passions or interests could be implicated in the question, men would deny stoutly

that the three angles of a right-angled triangle are equal to two right ones: and the disputes in religion look something like it. I only contend, however, that in all cases not of this peremptory and determinate cast, and where disputes commonly arise, inclination, habit, and example have a powerful share in throwing in the casting-weight to our opinions, and that he who is only tolerably free from these, and not their regular dupe or slave, is indeed 'a man of ten thousand.' Take, for instance, the example of a Catholic clergyman in a Popish country: it will generally be found that he lives and dies in the faith in which he was brought up, as the Protestant clergyman does in his—shall we say that the necessity of gaining a livelihood, or the prospect of preferment, that the early bias given to his mind by education and study, the pride of victory, the shame of defeat, the example and encouragement of all about him, the respect and love of his flock, the flattering notice of the great, have no effect in giving consistency to his opinions and carrying them through to the last? Yet, who will suppose that in either case this apparent uniformity is mere hypocrisy, or that the intellects of the two classes of divines are naturally adapted to the arguments in favour of the two religions they have occasion to profess? No; but the understanding takes a tincture from outward impulses and circumstances, and is led to dwell on those suggestions which favour, and to blind itself to the objections which impugn, the side to which it previously and morally inclines. Again, even in those who oppose established opinions, and form the little, firm, formidable phalanx of dissent, have not early instruction, spiritual pride, the love of contradiction, a resistance to usurped authority, as much to do with keeping up the war of sects and schisms as the abstract love of truth or conviction of the understanding? Does not persecution fan the flame in such fiery tempers, and does it not expire, or grow lukewarm, with indulgence and neglect? I have a sneaking kindness for a Popish

priest in this country; and to a Catholic peer I would willingly bow in passing. What are national antipathies, individual attachments, but so many expressions of the *moral* principle in forming our opinions? All our opinions become grounds on which we act, and build our expectations of good or ill; and this good or ill mixed up with them is soon changed into the ruling principle which modifies or violently supersedes the original cool determination of the reason and senses. The will, when it once gets a footing, turns the sober judgment out of doors. If we form an attachment to any one, are we not slow in giving it up? Or, if our suspicions are once excited, are we not equally rash and violent in believing the worst? Othello characterises himself as one

> ——'That loved not wisely, but too well;
> Of one not easily jealous—but, being wrought,
> Perplex'd in the extreme.'

And this answers to the movements and irregularities of passion and opinion which take place in human nature. If we wish a thing we are disposed to believe it: if we have been accustomed to believe it, we are the more obstinate in defending it on that account: if all the world differ from us in any question of moment, we are ashamed to own it; or are hurried by peevishness and irritation into extravagance and paradox. The weight of example presses upon us (whether we feel it or not) like the law of gravitation. He who sustains his opinion by the strength of conviction and evidence alone, unmoved by ridicule, neglect, obloquy, or privation, shows no less resolution than the Hindoo who makes and keeps a vow to hold his right arm in the air till it grows rigid and callous.

To have all the world against us is trying to a man's temper and philosophy. It unhinges even our opinion of our own motives and intentions. It is like striking the actual world from under our feet: the void that is left, the death-like pause, the chilling suspense, is fearful. The growth of an opinion is like the growth

of a limb; it receives its actual support and nourishment from the general body of the opinions, feelings, and practice of the world; without that, it soon withers, festers, and becomes useless. To what purpose write a good book, if it is sure to be pronounced a bad one, even before it is read? If our thoughts are to be blown stifling back upon ourselves, why utter them at all? It is only exposing what we love most to contumely and insult, and thus depriving ourselves of our own relish and satisfaction in them. Language is only made to communicate our sentiments, and if we can find no one to receive them, we are reduced to the silence of dumbness, we live but in the solitude of a dungeon. If we do not vindicate our opinions, we seem poor creatures who have no right to them; if we speak out, we are involved in continual brawls and controversy. If we contemn what others admire, we make ourselves odious; if we admire what they despise, we are equally ridiculous. We have not the applause of the world nor the support of a party; we can neither enjoy the freedom of social intercourse, nor the calm of privacy. With our respect for others, we lose confidence in ourselves: everything seems to be a subject of litigation—to want proof or confirmation; we doubt, by degrees, whether we stand on our head or our heels—whether we know our right hand from our left. If I am assured that I never wrote a sentence of common English in my life, how can I know that this is not the case? If I am told at one time that my writings are as heavy as lead, and at another, that they are more light and flimsy than the gossamer — what resource have I but to choose between the two? I could say, if this were the place, what those writings are.—'Make it the place, and never stand upon punctilio!'

They are not, then, so properly the works of an author by profession, as the thoughts of a metaphysician expressed by a painter. They are subtle and difficult problems translated into hieroglyphics. I

thought for several years on the hardest subjects, on Fate, Free-will, Foreknowledge absolute, without ever making use of words or images at all, and that has made them come in such throngs and confused heaps when I burst from that void of abstraction. In proportion to the tenuity to which my ideas had been drawn, and my abstinence from ornament and sensible objects, was the tenaciousness with which actual circumstances and picturesque imagery laid hold of my mind, when I turned my attention to them, or had to look round for illustrations. Till I began to paint, or till I became acquainted with the author of *The Ancient Mariner*, I could neither write nor speak. He encouraged me to write a book, which I did according to the original bent of my mind, making it as dry and meagre as I could, so that it fell still-born from the press, and none of those who abuse me for a shallow *catch-penny* writer have so much as heard of it. Yet, let me say, that work contains an important metaphysical discovery, supported by a continuous and severe train of reasoning, nearly as subtle and original as anything in Hume or Berkeley. I am not accustomed to speak of myself in this manner, but impudence may provoke modesty to justify itself. Finding this method did not answer, I despaired for a time; but some trifle I wrote in the *Morning Chronicle*, meeting the approbation of the editor and the town, I resolved to turn over a new leaf—to take the public at its word, to muster all the tropes and figures I could lay hands on, and, though I am a plain man, never to appear abroad but in an embroidered dress. Still, old habits will prevail; and I hardly ever set about a paragraph or a criticism, but there was an undercurrent of thought, or some generic distinction on which the whole turned. Having got my clue, I had no difficulty in stringing pearls upon it; and the more recondite the point, the more I laboured to bring it out and set it off by a variety of ornaments and allusions. This puzzled the scribes whose business it was to crush me. They could not see the

meaning: they would not see the colouring, for it hurt their eyes. One cried out, it was dull; another, that it was too fine by half: my friends took up this last alternative as the most favourable; and since then it has been agreed that I am a florid writer, somewhat flighty and paradoxical. Yet, when I wished to unburthen my mind in the *Edinburgh* by an article on English metaphysics, the editor, who echoes this *florid* charge, said he preferred what I wrote for effect, and was afraid of its being thought heavy! I have accounted for the flowers; the paradoxes may be accounted for in the same way. All abstract reasoning is in extremes, or only takes up one view of a question, or what is called the principle of the thing; and if you want to give this popularity and effect, you are in danger of running into extravagance and hyperbole. I have had to bring out some obscure distinction, or to combat some strong prejudice, and in doing this with all my might, may have often overshot the mark. It was easy to correct the excess of truth afterwards. I have been accused of inconsistency, for writing an essay, for instance, on the *Advantages of Pedantry*, and another on the *Ignorance of the Learned*, as if ignorance had not its comforts as well as knowledge. The personalities I have fallen into have never been gratuitous. If I have sacrificed my friends, it has always been to a theory. I have been found fault with for repeating myself, and for a narrow range of ideas. To a want of general reading, I plead guilty, and am sorry for it; but perhaps if I had read more, I might have thought less. As to my barrenness of invention, I have at least glanced over a number of subjects—painting, poetry, prose, plays, politics, parliamentary speakers, metaphysical lore, books, men, and things. There is some point, some fancy, some feeling, some taste, shown in treating of these. Which of my conclusions has been reversed? Is it what I said ten years ago of the Bourbons which raised the war-whoop against me? Surely all the world are of that opinion now. I have, then, given

proofs of some talent, and of more honesty: if there is haste or want of method, there is no commonplace, nor a line that licks the dust; and if I do not appear to more advantage, I at least appear such as I am. If the Editor of the *Atlas* will do me the favour to look over my *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, will dip into any essay I ever wrote, and will take a sponge and clear the dust from the face of my *Old Woman*, I hope he will, upon second thoughts, acquit me of an absolute dearth of resources and want of versatility in the direction of my studies.

1828.

ESSAY VI

ON PERSONAL IDENTITY

'Ha! here's three of us are sophisticated.'—LEAR.

'IF I were not Alexander, I would be Diogenes!' said the Macedonian hero; and the cynic might have retorted the compliment upon the prince by saying, that, 'were he not Diogenes, he would be Alexander!' This is the universal exception, the invariable reservation that our self-love makes, the utmost point at which our admiration or envy ever arrives—to wish, if we were not ourselves, to be some other individual. No one ever wishes to be another, *instead* of himself. We may feel a desire to change places with others—to have one man's fortune—another's health or strength—his wit or learning, or accomplishments of various kinds—

> 'Wishing to be like one more rich in hope,
> Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
> Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope';

but we would still be ourselves, to possess and enjoy all these, or we would not give a doit for them. But, on this supposition, what in truth should we be the better for them? It is not we, but another, that would reap the benefit; and what do we care about that other? In that case, the present owner might as well continue to enjoy them. *We* should not be gainers by the change. If the meanest beggar who crouches at a palace gate, and looks up with awe and suppliant fear to the proud inmate as he passes, could be put in possession of all the finery, the pomp, the

luxury, and wealth that he sees and envies, on the sole condition of getting rid, together with his rags and misery, of all recollection that there ever was such a wretch as himself, he would reject the proffered boon with scorn. He might be glad to change situations; but he would insist on keeping his own thoughts, to *compare notes*, and point the transition by the force of contrast. He would not, on any account, forego his self-congratulation on the unexpected accession of good fortune, and his escape from past suffering. All that excites his cupidity, his envy, his repining or despair, is the alternative of some great good to himself; and if, in order to attain that object, he is to part with his own existence to take that of another, he can feel no farther interest in it. This is the language both of passion and reason.

Here lies 'the rub that makes calamity of so long life': for it is not barely the apprehension of the ills that 'in that sleep of death may come,' but also our ignorance and indifference to the promised good, that produces our repugnance and backwardness to quit the present scene. No man, if he had his choice, would be the angel Gabriel to-morrow! What is the angel Gabriel to him but a splendid vision? He might as well have an ambition to be turned into a bright cloud, or a particular star. The interpretation of which is, he can have no sympathy with the angel Gabriel. Before he can be transformed into so bright and ethereal an essence, he must necessarily 'put off this mortal coil'—be divested of all his old habits, passions, thoughts, and feelings—to be endowed with other attributes, lofty and beatific, of which he has no notion; and, therefore, he would rather remain a little longer in this mansion of clay, which, with all its flaws, inconveniences, and perplexities, contains all that he has any real knowledge of, or any affection for. When, indeed, he is about to quit it in spite of himself and has no other chance left to escape the darkness of the tomb he may then have no objection (making a virtue of necessity) to put on angel's wings,

to have radiant locks, to wear a wreath of amaranth, and thus to masquerade it in the skies.

It is an instance of the truthful beauty of the ancient mythology, that the various transmutations it recounts are never voluntary, or of favourable omen, but are interposed as a timely release to those who, driven on by fate, and urged to the last extremity of fear or anguish, are turned into a flower, a plant, an animal, a star, a precious stone, or into some object that may inspire pity or mitigate our regret for their misfortunes. Narcissus was transformed into a flower; Daphne into a laurel: Arethusa into a fountain (by the favour of the gods)—but not till no other remedy was left for their despair. It is a sort of smiling cheat upon death, and graceful compromise with annihilation. It is better to exist by proxy, in some softened type and soothing allegory, than not at all—to breathe in a flower or shine in a constellation, than to be utterly forgot; but no one would change his natural condition (if he could help it) for that of a bird, an insect, a beast, or a fish, however delightful their mode of existence, or however enviable he might deem their lot compared to his own. Their thoughts are not our thoughts—their happiness is not our happiness; nor can we enter into it, except with a passing smile of approbation, or as a refinement of fancy. As the poet sings:

> 'What more felicity can fall to creature
> Than to enjoy delight with liberty,
> And to be lord of all the works of nature?
> To reign in the air from earth to highest sky;
> To feed on flowers and weeds of glorious feature;
> To taste whatever thing doth please the eye?—
> Who rests not pleased with such happiness,
> Well worthy he to taste of wretchedness!'

This is gorgeous description and fine declamation: yet who would be found to act upon it, even in the forming of a wish; or would not rather be the thrall of wretchedness, than launch out (by the aid of some magic spell) into all the delights of such a butterfly state of existence? The French (if any people can)

may be said to enjoy this airy, heedless gaiety and unalloyed exuberance of satisfaction: yet what Englishman would deliberately change with them? We would sooner be miserable after our own fashion than happy after theirs. It is not happiness, then, in the abstract, which we seek, that can be addressed as

> 'That something still that prompts th' eternal sigh,
> For which we wish to live or dare to die,'

but a happiness suited to our tastes and faculties—that has become a part of ourselves, by habit and enjoyment—that is endeared to us by a thousand recollections, privations, and sufferings. No one, then, would willingly change his country or his kind for the most plausible pretences held out to him. The most humiliating punishment inflicted in ancient fable is the change of sex: not that it was any degradation in itself—but that it must occasion a total derangement of the moral economy and confusion of the sense of personal propriety. The thing is said to have happened *au sens contraire*, in our time. The story is to be met with in 'very choice Italian'; and Lord D—— tells it in very plain English!

We may often find ourselves envying the possessions of others, and sometimes inadvertently indulging a wish to change places with them altogether; but our self-love soon discovers some excuse to be off the bargain we were ready to strike, and retracts 'vows made in haste, as violent and void.' We might make up our minds to the alteration in every other particular; but, when it comes to the point, there is sure to be some trait or feature of character in the object of our admiration to which we cannot reconcile ourselves—some favourite quality or darling foible of our own, with which we can by no means resolve to part. The more enviable the situation of another, the more entirely to our taste, the more reluctant we are to leave any part of ourselves behind that would be so fully capable of appreciating all the exquisiteness of its new situation, or not to enter

into the possession of such an imaginary reversion of good fortune with all our previous inclinations and sentiments. The outward circumstances were fine: they only wanted a *soul* to enjoy them, and that soul is ours (as the costly ring wants the peerless jewel to perfect and set it off). The humble prayer and petition to sneak into visionary felicity by personal adoption, or the surrender of our own personal pretentions, always ends in a daring project of usurpation, and a determination to expel the actual proprietor, and supply his place so much more worthily with our own identity—not bating a single jot of it. Thus, in passing through a fine collection of pictures, who has not envied the privilege of visiting it every day, and wished to be the owner? But the rising sigh is soon checked, and 'the native hue of emulation is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,' when we come to ask ourselves, not merely whether the owner has any taste at all for these splendid works, and does not look upon them as so much expensive furniture, like his chairs and tables—but whether he has the same precise (and only true) taste that we have—whether he has the very same favourites that we have—whether he may not be so blind as to prefer a Vandyke to a Titian, a Ruysdael to a Claude; nay, whether he may not have other pursuits and avocations that draw off his attention from the sole objects of our idolatry, and which seem to us mere impertinences and waste of time? In that case, we at once lose all patience, and exclaim indignantly, 'Give us back our taste, and keep your pictures!' It is not we who should envy them the possession of the treasure, but they who should envy us the true and exclusive enjoyment of it. A similar train of feeling seems to have dictated Warton's spirited *Sonnet on visiting Wilton House*:

> 'From Pembroke's princely dome, where mimic art
> Decks with a magic hand the dazzling bowers,
> Its living hues where the warm pencil pours,
> And breathing forms from the rude marble start,

> How to life's humbler scene can I depart?
> My breast all glowing from those gorgeous towers,
> In my low cell how cheat the sullen hours?
> Vain the complaint! For fancy can impart
> (To fate superior and to fortune's power)
> Whate'er adorns the stately storied-hall:
> She, 'mid the dungeon's solitary gloom,
> Can dress the Graces in their attic-pall;
> Bid the green landscape's vernal beauty bloom;
> And in bright trophies clothe the twilight wall.'

One sometimes passes by a gentleman's park, an old family-seat, with its moss-grown, ruinous paling, its 'glades mild-opening to the genial day,' or embrowned with forest-trees. Here one would be glad to spend one's life, 'shut up in measureless content,' and to grow old beneath ancestral oaks, instead of gaining a precarious, irksome, and despised livelihood, by indulging romantic sentiments, and writing disjointed descriptions of them. The thought has scarcely risen to the lips, when we learn that the owner of so blissful a seclusion is a thoroughbred fox-hunter, a preserver of the game, a brawling electioneerer, a Tory member of parliament, a 'No-Popery' man!—'I'd sooner be a dog, and bay the moon!' Who would be Sir Thomas Lethbridge for his title and estate? asks one man. But would not almost any one wish to be Sir Francis Burdett, the man of the people, the idol of the electors of Westminster? says another. I can only answer for myself. Respectable and honest as he is, there is something in his white boots, and white breeches, and white coat, and white hair, and white hat, and red face, that I cannot, by any effort of candour, confound my personal identity with! If Mr. —— can prevail on Sir Francis to exchange, let him do so by all means. Perhaps they might contrive to *club* a soul between them! Could I have had my will, I should have been born a lord: but one would not be a booby lord neither. I am haunted by an odd fancy of driving down the Great North Road in a chaise and four, about fifty years ago, and coming to the inn at Ferry-bridge with outriders, white

favours, and a coronet on the panels; and then, too, I choose my companion in the coach. Really there is a witchcraft in all this that makes it necessary to turn away from it, lest, in the conflict between imagination and impossibility, I should grow feverish and light-headed! But, on the other hand, if one was a born lord, should one have the same idea (that every one else has) of *a peeress in her own right?* Is not distance, giddy elevation, mysterious awe, an impassable gulf, necessary to form this idea in the mind, that fine ligament of 'ethereal braid, sky-woven,' that lets down heaven upon earth, fair as enchantment, soft as Berenice's hair, bright and garlanded like Ariadne's crown; and is it not better to have had this idea all through life—to have caught but glimpses of it, to have known it but in a dream—than to have been born a lord ten times over, with twenty pampered menials at one's beck, and twenty descents to boast of? It is the envy of certain privileges, the sharp privations we have undergone, the cutting neglect we have met with from the want of birth or title that gives its zest to the distinction: the thing itself may be indifferent or contemptible enough. It is the *becoming* a lord that is to be desired; but he who becomes a lord in reality may be an upstart—a mere pretender, without the sterling essence; so that all that is of any worth in this supposed transition is purely imaginary and impossible.[1] Kings are so accustomed to look down on all the rest of the world, that they consider the condition of mortality as vile and intolerable, if stripped of royal state, and cry out in the bitterness of their despair, 'Give me a crown, or a tomb!' It should seem from this as if all mankind would change with the first

[1] When Lord Byron was cut by the great, on account of his quarrel with his wife, he stood leaning on a marble slab at the entrance of a room, while troops of duchesses and countesses passed out. One little, pert, red-haired girl staid a few paces behind the rest; and, as she passed him, said with a nod, 'Aye, you should have married me, and then all this wouldn't have happened to you!'

crowned head that could propose the alternative, or that it would be only the presumption of the supposition, or a sense of their own unworthiness, that would deter them. Perhaps there is not a single throne that, if it was to be filled by this sort of voluntary metempsychosis, would not remain empty. Many would, no doubt, be glad to 'monarchise, be feared, and kill with looks' in their own persons and after their own fashion: but who would be the *double* of those shadows of a shade—those 'tenth transmitters of a foolish face'—Charles x. and Ferdinand VII.? If monarchs have little sympathy with mankind, mankind have even less with monarchs. They are merely to us a sort of state-puppets, or royal wax-work, which we may gaze at with superstitious wonder, but have no wish to become; and he who should meditate such a change must not only feel by anticipation an utter contempt for the *slough* of humanity which he is prepared to cast, but must feel an absolute void and want of attraction in those lofty and incomprehensible sentiments which are to supply its place. With respect to actual royalty, the spell is in a great measure broken. But, among ancient monarchs, there is no one, I think, who envies Darius or Xerxes. One has a different feeling with respect to Alexander or Pyrrhus; but this is because they were great men as well as great kings, and the soul is up in arms at the mention of their names as at the sound of a trumpet. But as to all the rest—those 'in the catalogue who go for kings'—the praying, eating, drinking, dressing monarchs of the earth, in time past or present—one would as soon think of wishing to personate the Golden Calf, or to turn out with Nebuchadnezzar to graze, as to be transformed into one of that 'swinish multitude.' There is no point of affinity. The extrinsic circumstances are imposing; but, within, there is nothing but morbid humours and proud flesh! Some persons might vote for Charlemagne; and there are others who would have no objection to be the modern Charlemagne, with all he inflicted and

suffered, even after the necromantic field of Waterloo, and the bloody wreath on the vacant brow of the conqueror, and that fell jailer, set over him by a craven foe, that 'glared round his soul, and mocked his closing eyelids!'

It has been remarked, that could we at pleasure change our situation in life, more persons would be found anxious to descend than to ascend in the scale of society. One reason may be, that we have it more in our power to do so; and this encourages the thought, and makes it familiar to us. A second is, that we naturally wish to throw off the cares of state, of fortune or business, that oppress us, and to seek repose before we find it in the grave. A third reason is, that, as we descend to common life, the pleasures are simple, natural, such as all can enter into, and therefore excite a general interest, and combine all suffrages. Of the different occupations of life, none is beheld with a more pleasing emotion, or less aversion to a change for our own, than that of a shepherd tending his flock: the pastoral ages have been the envy and the theme of all succeeding ones; and a beggar with his crutch is more closely allied than the monarch and his crown to the associations of mirth and heart's-ease. On the other hand, it must be admitted that our pride is too apt to prefer grandeur to happiness; and that our passions make us envy great vices oftener than great virtues.

The world show their sense in nothing more than in a distrust and aversion to those changes of situation which only tend to make the successful candidates ridiculous, and which do not carry along with them a mind adequate to the circumstances. The common people, in this respect, are more shrewd and judicious than their superiors, from feeling their own awkwardness and incapacity, and often decline, with an instinctive modesty, the troublesome honours intended for them. They do not overlook their original defects so readily as others overlook their acquired advantages. It is not wonderful, therefore, that

opera-singers and dancers refuse or only *condescend* as it were, to accept lords, though the latter are too often fascinated by them. The fair performer knows (better than her unsuspecting admirer) how little connection there is between the dazzling figure she makes on the stage and that which she may make in private life, and is in no hurry to convert 'the drawing-room into a Green-room.' The nobleman (supposing him not to be very wise) is astonished at the miraculous powers of art in

'The fair, the chaste, the inexpressive *she*';

and thinks such a paragon must easily conform to the routine of manners and society which every trifling woman of quality of his acquaintance, from sixteen to sixty, goes through without effort. This is a hasty or a wilful conclusion. Things of habit only come by habit, and inspiration here avails nothing. A man of fortune who marries an actress for her fine performance of tragedy, has been well compared to the person who bought Punch. The lady is not unfrequently aware of the inconsequentiality, and unwilling to be put on the shelf, and hid in the nursery of some musty country mansion. Servant girls, of any sense and spirit, treat their masters (who make serious love to them) with suitable contempt. What is it but a proposal to drag an unmeaning trollop at his heels through life, to her own annoyance and the ridicule of all his friends? No woman, I suspect, ever forgave a man who raised her from a low condition in life (it is a perpetual obligation and reproach); though I believe, men often feel the most disinterested regard for women under such circumstances. Sancho Panza discovered no less folly in his eagerness to enter upon his new government, than wisdom in quitting it as fast as possible. Why will Mr. Cobbett persist in getting into Parliament? He would find himself no longer the same man. What member of Parliament, I should like to know, could write his *Register*? As

a popular partisan, he may (for aught I can say) be a match for the whole Honourable House; but, by obtaining a seat in St. Stephen's Chapel, he would only be equal to a 576th part of it. It was surely a puerile ambition in Mr Addington to succeed Mr Pitt as prime minister. The situation was only a foil to his imbecility. Gipsies have a fine faculty of evasion; catch them who can in the same place or story twice! Take them; teach them the comforts of civilisation; confine them in warm rooms, with thick carpets and down beds; and they will fly out of the window—like the bird, described by Chaucer, out of its golden cage. I maintain that there is no common language or medium of understanding between people of education and without it—between those who judge of things from books or from their senses. Ignorance has so far the advantage over learning; for it can make an appeal to you from what you know; but you cannot react upon it through that which it is a perfect stranger to. Ignorance is, therefore, power. This is what foiled Buonaparte in Spain and Russia. The people can only be gained over by informing them, though they may be enslaved by fraud or force. 'What is it, then, he does like?'—'Good victuals and drink!' As if you had these not too; but because he has them not, he thinks of nothing else, and laughs at you and your refinements, supposing you live upon air. To those who are deprived of every other advantage, even nature is a *book sealed*. I have made this capital mistake all my life, in imagining that those objects which lay open to all, and excited an interest merely from the *idea* of them, spoke a common language to all; and that nature was a kind of universal home, where all ages, sexes, classes meet. Not so. The vital air, the sky, the woods, the streams—all these go for nothing, except with a favoured few. The poor are taken up with their bodily wants—the rich, with external acquisitions: the one, with the sense of property—the other, of its privation. Both have the same distaste for

sentiment. The *genteel* are the slaves of appearances —the vulgar, of necessity; and neither has the smallest regard to worth, refinement, generosity. All savages are irreclaimable. I can understand the Irish character better than the Scotch. I hate the formal crust of circumstances and the mechanism of society. I have been recommended, indeed, to settle down into some respectable profession for life:

'Ah! why so soon the blossom tear?'

I am 'in no haste to be venerable!'

In thinking of those one might wish to have been, many people will exclaim, 'Surely, you would like to have been Shakspeare?' Would Garrick have consented to the change? No, nor should he; for the applause which he received, and on which he lived, was more adapted to his genius and taste. If Garrick had agreed to be Shakspeare, he would have made it a previous condition that he was to be a better player. He would have insisted on taking some higher part than *Polonius* or the *Gravedigger.* Ben Jonson and his companions at the Mermaid would not have known their old friend Will in his new disguise. The modern Roscius would have scouted the halting player. He would have shrunk from the parts of the inspired poet. If others are unlike us, we feel it as a presumption and an impertinence to usurp their place; if they are like us, it seems a work of supererogation. We are not to be cozened out of our existence for nothing. It has been ingeniously urged, as an objection to having been Milton, that 'then we should not have had the pleasure of reading *Paradise Lost.*' Perhaps I should incline to draw lots with Pope, but that he was deformed, and did not sufficiently relish Milton and Shakspeare. As it is, we can enjoy his verses and theirs too. Why, having these, need we ever be dissatisfied with ourselves? Goldsmith is a person whom I considerably affect notwithstanding his blunders and his misfortunes. The author of the

Vicar of Wakefield, and of *Retaliation*, is one whose temper must have had something eminently amiable, delightful, gay, and happy in it.

'A certain tender bloom his fame o'erspreads.'

But then I could never make up my mind to his preferring Rowe and Dryden to the worthies of the Elizabethan age; nor could I, in like manner, forgive Sir Joshua—whom I number among those whose existence was marked with a *white stone*, and on whose tomb might be inscribed 'Thrice Fortunate!'—his treating Nicholas Poussin with contempt. Differences in matters of taste and opinion are points of honour—'stuff o' the conscience'—stumbling-blocks not to be got over. Others, we easily grant, may have more wit, learning, imagination, riches, strength, beauty, which we should be glad to borrow of them; but that they have sounder or better views of things, or that we should act wisely in changing in this respect, is what we can by no means persuade ourselves. We may not be the lucky possessors of what is best or most desirable; but our notion of what is best and most desirable we will give up to no man by choice or compulsion; and unless others (the greatest wits or brightest geniuses) can come into our way of thinking, we must humbly beg leave to remain as we are. A Calvinistic preacher would not relinquish a single point of faith to be the Pope of Rome; nor would a strict Unitarian acknowledge the mystery of the Holy Trinity to have painted Raphael's *Assembly of the Just*. In the range of *ideal* excellence, we are distracted by variety and repelled by differences: the imagination is fickle and fastidious, and requires a combination of all possible qualifications, which never met. Habit alone is blind and tenacious of the most homely advantages; and after running the tempting round of nature, fame and fortune, we wrap ourselves up in our familiar recollections and humble pretensions—as the lark, after long fluttering on sunny wing, sinks into its lowly bed!

We can have no very importunate craving, nor very great confidence, in wishing to change characters, except with those with whom we are intimately acquainted by their works; and having these by us (which is all we know or covet in them), what would we have more? We can have *no more of a cat than her skin*; nor of an author than his brains. By becoming Shakspeare in reality we cut ourselves out of reading Milton, Pope, Dryden, and a thousand more —all of whom we have in our possession, enjoy, and *are*, by turns, in the best part of them, their thoughts, without any metamorphosis or miracle at all. What a microcosm is ours! What a Proteus is the human mind! All that we know, think of, or can admire, in a manner becomes ourselves. We are not (the meanest of us) a volume, but a whole library! In this calculation of problematical contingencies, the lapse of time makes no difference. One would as soon have been Raphael as any modern artist. Twenty, thirty, or forty years of elegant enjoyment and lofty feeling were as great a luxury in the fifteenth as in the nineteenth century. But Raphael did not live to see Claude, nor Titian Rembrandt. Those who found arts and sciences are not witnesses of their accumulated results and benefits; nor, in general, do they reap the meed of praise which is their due. We who come after in some 'laggard age' have more enjoyment of their fame than they had. Who would have missed the sight of the Louvre in all its glory to have been one of those whose works enriched it? Would it not have been giving a certain good for an uncertain advantage? No: I am as sure (if it is not presumption to say so) of what passed through Raphael's mind as of what passes through my own; and I know the difference between seeing (though even that is a rare privilege) and producing such perfection. At one time I was so devoted to Rembrandt, that I think if the Prince of Darkness had made me the offer in some rash mood, I should have been tempted to close with it, and should have become (in happy hour,

and in downright earnest) the great master of light and shade!

I have run myself out of my materials for this Essay, and want a well-turned sentence or two to conclude with; like Benvennto Cellini, who complains that, with all the brass, tin, iron, and lead he could muster in the house, his statue of Perseus was left imperfect, with a dent in the heel of it. Once more, then—I believe there is one character that all the world would like to change with—which is that of a favoured rival. Even hatred gives way to envy. We would be anything—a toad in a dungeon—to live upon her smile, which is our all of earthly hope and happiness; nor can we, in our infatuation, conceive that there is any difference of feeling on the subject, or that the pressure of her hand is not in itself divine, making those to whom such bliss is deigned like the Immortal Gods!

1828.

ESSAY VII

MIND AND MOTIVE

'The web of our lives is of a mingled yarn.'

'Anthony Codrus Urceus, a most learned and unfortunate Italian, born 1446, was a striking instance' (says his biographer) 'of the miseries men bring upon themselves by setting their affections unreasonably on trifles. This learned man lived at Forli, and had an apartment in the palace. His room was so very dark, that he was forced to use a candle in the day time; and one day, going abroad without putting it out, his library was set on fire, and some papers which he had prepared for the press were burned. The instant he was informed of this ill news, he was affected even to madness. He ran furiously to the palace, and, stopping at the door of his apartment, he cried aloud, "Christ Jesus! what mighty crime have I committed? whom of your followers have I ever injured, that you thus rage with inexpiable hatred against me?" Then turning himself to an image of the Virgin Mary near at hand, "Virgin" (says he) "hear what I have to say, for I speak in earnest, and with a composed spirit. If I shall happen to address you in my dying moments, I humbly entreat you not to hear me, nor receive me into heaven, for I am determined to spend all eternity in hell." Those who heard these blasphemous expressions endeavoured to comfort him, but all to no purpose; for the society of mankind being no longer supportable to him, he left the city, and retired, like a savage, to the deep solitude of a wood. Some say that he

was murdered there by ruffians ; others that he died at Bologna, in 1500, after much contrition and penitence.'

Almost every one may here read the history of his own life. There is scarcely a moment in which we are not in some degree guilty of the same kind of absurdity, which was here carried to such a singular excess. We waste our regrets on what cannot be recalled, or fix our desires on what we know cannot be attained. Every hour is the slave of the last ; and we are seldom masters either of our thoughts or of our actions. We are the creatures of imagination, passion, and self-will, more than of reason or self-interest. Rousseau, in his *Emilius*, proposed to educate a perfectly reasonable man, who was to have passions and affections like other men, but with an absolute control over them. He was to love and to be wise. This is a contradiction in terms. Even in the common transactions and daily intercourse of life, we are governed by whim, caprice, prejudice, or accident. The falling of a tea-cup puts us out of temper for the day ; and a quarrel that commenced about the pattern of a gown may end only with our lives.

> 'Friends now fast sworn,
> On a dissension of a doit, break out
> To bitterest enmity. So fellest foes,
> Whose passions and whose plots have broke their sleep,
> To take the one the other, by some chance,
> Some trick not worth an egg, shall grow dear friends,
> And interjoin their issues.'

We are little better than humoured children to the last, and play a mischievous game at cross purposes with our own happiness and that of others.

We have given the above story as a striking contradiction to the prevailing doctrine of modern systems of morals and metaphysics, that man is purely a sensual and selfish animal, governed solely by a regard either to his immediate gratification or future interest. This doctrine we mean to oppose

with all our might, whenever we meet with it. We are, however, less disposed to quarrel with it, as it is opposed to reason and philosophy, than as it interferes with common sense and observation. If the absurdity in question had been confined to the schools, we should not have gone out of our way to meddle with it: but it has gone abroad in the world, has crept into ladies' boudoirs, is entered in the commonplace book of beaux, is in the mouth of the learned and ignorant, and forms a part of popular opinion. It is perpetually applied as a false measure to the characters and conduct of men in the common affairs of the world, and it is therefore our business to rectify it, if we can. In fact, whoever sets out on the idea of reducing all our motives and actions to a simple principle, must either take a very narrow and superficial view of human nature, or make a very perverse use of his understanding in reasoning on what he sees. The frame of our minds, like that of his body, is exceedingly complicated. Besides mere sensibility to pleasure and pain, there are other original independent principles, necessarily interwoven with the nature of man as an active and intelligent being, and which, blended together in different proportions, give their form and colour to our lives. Without some other essential faculties, such as will, imagination, etc., to give effect and direction to our physical sensibility, this faculty could be of no possible use or influence; and with those other faculties joined to it, this pretended instinct of self-love will be subject to be everlastingly modified and controlled by those faculties, both in what regards our own good and that of others; that is, must itself become in a great measure dependent on the very instruments it uses. The two most predominant principles in the mind, besides sensibility and self-interest, are imagination and self-will, or (in general) the love of strong excitement, both in thought and action. To these sources may be traced the various passions, pursuits, habits, affections, follies and caprices, virtues and vices of

mankind. We shall confine ourselves, in the present article, to give some account of the influence exercised by the imagination over the feelings. To an intellectual being, it cannot be altogether arbitrary what ideas it shall have, whether pleasurable or painful. Our ideas do not originate in our love of pleasure, and they cannot, therefore, depend absolutely upon it. They have another principle. If the imagination were 'the servile slave' of our self-love, if our ideas were emanations of our sensitive nature, encouraged if agreeable, and excluded the instant they became otherwise, or encroached on the former principle, then there might be a tolerable pretence for the epicurean philosophy which is here spoken of. But for any such entire and mechanical subservieney of the operations of the one principle to the dictates of the other, there is not the slightest foundation in reality. The attention which the mind gives to its ideas is not always owing to the gratification derived from them, but to the strength and truth of the impressions themselves, *i.e.* to their involuntary power over the mind. This observation will account for a very general principle in the mind, which cannot, we conceive, be satisfactorily explained in any other way, we mean *the power of fascination*. Every one has heard the story of the girl who, being left alone by her companions, in order to frighten her, in a room with a dead body, at first attempted to get out, and shrieked violently for assistance, but finding herself shut in, ran and embraced the corpse, and was found senseless in its arms.

It is said that in such cases there is a desperate effort made to get rid of the dread by converting it into the reality. There may be some truth in this account, but we do not think it contains the whole truth. The event produced in the present instance does not bear out the conclusion. The progress of the passion does not seem to have been that of diminishing or removing the terror by coming in contact with the object, but of carrying this terror to its height

from an intense and irresistible impulse overcoming every other feeling.

It is a well-known fact that few persons can stand safely on the edge of a precipice, or walk along the parapet wall of a house, without being in danger of throwing themselves down; not, we presume, from a principle of self-preservation; but in consequence of a strong idea having taken possession of the mind from which it cannot well escape, which absorbs every other consideration, and confounds and overrules all self-regards. The impulse cannot in this case be resolved into a desire to remove the uneasiness of fear, for the only danger arises from the fear. We have been told by a person not at all given to exaggeration, that he once felt a strong propensity to throw himself into a cauldron of boiling lead, into which he was looking. These are what Shakspeare calls 'the toys of desperation.' People sometimes marry, and even fall in love on this principle —that is, through mere apprehension, or what is called a fatality. In like manner, we find instances of persons who are, as it were, naturally delighted with whatever is disagreeable—who catch all sorts of unbecoming tones and gestures—who always say what they should not, and what they do not mean to say—in whom intemperance of imagination and incontinence of tongue are a disease, and who are governed by an almost infallible instinct of absurdity.

The love of imitation has the same general source. We dispute for ever about Hogarth, and the question can never be decided according to the common ideas on the subject of taste. His pictures appeal to the love of truth, not to the sense of beauty: but the one is as much an essential principle of our nature as the other. They fill up the void of the mind; they present an everlasting succession and variety of ideas. There is a fine observation somewhere made by Aristotle, that the mind has a natural appetite of curiosity or desire to know; and most of that knowledge which comes in by the eye, for this presents

us with the greatest variety of differences. Hogarth is relished only by persons of a certain strength of mind and penetration into character; for the subjects in themselves are not pleasing, and this objection is only redeemed by the exercise and activity which they give to the understanding. The great difference between what is meant by a severe and an effeminate taste or style, depends on the distinction here made.

Our teasing ourselves to recollect the names of places or persons we have forgotten, the love of riddles and of abstruse philosophy, are all illustrations of the same general principle of curiosity, or the love of intellectual excitement. Again, our impatience to be delivered of a secret that we know; the necessity which lovers have for confidants, auricular confession, and the declarations so commonly made by criminals of their guilt, are effects of the involuntary power exerted by the imagination over the feelings. Nothing can be more untrue, than that the whole course of our ideas, passions, and pursuits, is regulated by a regard to self-interest. Our attachment to certain objects is much oftener in proportion to the strength of the impression they make on us, to their power of riveting and fixing the attention, than to the gratification we derive from them. We are, perhaps, more apt to dwell upon circumstances that excite disgust and shock our feelings, than on those of an agreeable nature. This, at least, is the case where this disposition is particularly strong, as in people of nervous feelings and morbid habits of thinking. Thus the mind is often haunted with painful images and recollections, from the hold they have taken of the imagination. We cannot shake them off, though we strive to do it: nay, we even court their company; we will not part with them out of our presence; we strain our aching sight after them; we anxiously recall every feature, and contemplate them in all their aggravated colours. There are a thousand passions and fancies that thwart our purposes and disturb our repose. Grief and fear are

almost as welcome inmates of the breast as hope or joy, and more obstinately cherished. We return to the objects which have excited them, we brood over them, they become almost inseparable from the mind, necessary to it; they assimilate all objects to the gloom of our own thoughts, and make the will a party against itself. This is one chief source of most of the passions that prey like vultures on the heart, and embitter human life. We hear moralists and divines perpetually exclaiming, with mingled indignation and surprise, at the folly of mankind in obstinately persisting in these tormenting and violent passions, such as envy, revenge, sullenness, despair, etc. This is to them a mystery; and it will always remain an inexplicable one, while the love of happiness is considered as the only spring of human conduct and desires.[1]

The love of power or action is another independent principle of the human mind, in the different degrees in which it exists, and which are not by any means in exact proportion to its physical sensibility. It seems evidently absurd to suppose that sensibility to pleasure or pain is the only principle of action. It is almost too obvious to remark, that sensibility alone, without an active principle in the mind, could never produce action. The soul might lie dissolved in pleasure, or be agonised with woe; but the impulses of feeling, in order to excite passion, desire, or will, must be first communicated to some other faculty. There must be a principle, a fund of activity somewhere, by and through which our sensibility operates; and that this active principle owes all its force, its precise

[1] As a contrast to the story at the beginning of this article, it will be not amiss to mention that of Sir Isaac Newton, on a somewhat similar occasion. He had prepared some papers for the press with great care and study, but happening to leave a lighted candle on the table with them, his dog Diamond overturned the candle, and the labour of several years was destroyed. This great man, on seeing what was done, only shook his head, and said with a smile, 'Ah, Diamond, you don't know what mischief you have done!'

degree of direction, to the sensitive faculty, is neither self-evident nor true. Strength of will is not always nor generally in proportion to strength of feeling. There are different degrees of activity, as of sensibility, in the mind; and our passions, characters, and pursuits, often depend no less upon the one than on the other. We continually make a distinction in common discourse between sensibility and irritability, between passion and feeling, between the nerves and muscles; and we find that the most voluptuous people are in general the most indolent. Every one who has looked closely into human nature must have observed persons who are naturally and habitually restless in the extreme, but without any extraordinary susceptibility to pleasure or pain, always making or finding excuses to do something—whose actions constantly outrun the occasion, and who are eager in the pursuit of the greatest trifles—whose impatience of the smallest repose keeps them always employed about nothing—and whose whole lives are a continued work of supererogation. There are others, again, who seem born to act from a spirit of contradiction only, that is, who are ready to act not only without a reason, but against it—who are ever at cross-purposes with themselves and others—who are not satisfied unless they are doing two opposite things at a time—who contradict what you say, and if you assent to them, contradict what they have said—who regularly leave the pursuit in which they are successful to engage in some other in which they have no chance of success—who make a point of encountering difficulties and aiming at impossibilities, that there may be no end of their exhaustless task: while there is a third class whose *vis inertiæ* scarcely any motives can overcome—who are devoured by their feelings, and the slaves of their passions, but who can take no pains and use no means to gratify them—who, if roused to action by any unforeseen accident, require a continued stimulus to urge them on—who fluctuate between desire and want of resolution—whose brightest pro-

jects burst like a bubble as soon as formed—who yield to every obstacle—who almost sink under the weight of the atmosphere—who cannot brush aside a cobweb in their path, and are stopped by an insect's wing. Indolence is want of will—the absence or defect of the active principle—a repugnance to motion; and whoever has been much tormented with this passion, must, we are sure, have felt that the inclination to indulge it is something very distinct from the love of pleasure or actual enjoyment. Ambition is the reverse of indolence, and is the love of power or action in great things. Avarice, also, as it relates to the acquisition of riches, is, in a great measure, an active and enterprising feeling; nor does the hoarding of wealth, after it is acquired, seem to have much connection with the love of pleasure. What is called niggardliness, very often, we are convinced from particular instances that we have known, arises less from a selfish principle than from a love of contrivance—from the study of economy as an art, for want of a better—from a pride in making the most of a little, and in not exceeding a certain expense previously determined upon; all which is wilfulness, and is perfectly consistent, as it is frequently found united, with the utmost lavish expenditure and the utmost disregard for money on other occasions. A miser may, in general, be looked upon as a particular species of *virtuoso*. The constant desire in the rich to leave wealth in large masses, by aggrandising some branch of their families, or sometimes in such a manner as to accumulate for centuries, shows that the imagination has a considerable share in this passion. Intemperance, debauchery, gluttony, and other vices of that kind, may be attributed to an excess of sensuality or gross sensibility; though, even here, we think it evident that habits of intoxication are produced quite as much by the strength as by the agreeableness of the excitement; and with respect to some other vicious habits, curiosity makes many more votaries than inclination. The love of truth,

when it predominates, produces inquisitive characters, the whole tribe of gossips, tale-bearers, harmless busybodies, your blunt honest creatures, who never conceal what they think, and who are the more sure to tell it you the less you want to hear it—and now and then a philosopher.

Our passions in general are to be traced more immediately to the active part of our nature, to the love of power, or to strength of will. Such are all those which arise out of the difficulty of accomplishment, which become more intense from the efforts made to attain the object, and which derive their strength from opposition. Mr. Hobbes says well on this subject:

'But for an utmost end, in which the ancient philosophers placed felicity, and disputed much concerning the way thereto, there is no such thing in this world, nor way to it, more than to Utopia; for while we live, we have desires, and desire presupposeth a further end. Seeing all delight is appetite, and desire of something further, there can be no contentment but in proceeding, and therefore we are not to marvel, when we see that as men attain to more riches, honour, or other power, so their appetite continually groweth more and more; and when they are come to the utmost degree of some kind of power they pursue some other, as long as in any kind they think themselves behind any other. Of those, therefore, that have attained the highest degree of honour and riches, some have affected mastery in some art, as Nero in music and poetry, Commodus in the art of a gladiator; and such as affect not some such thing, must find diversion and recreation of their thoughts in the contention either of play or business, and men justly complain as of a great grief that they know not what to do. Felicity, therefore, by which we mean continual delight, consists not in having prospered, but in prospering.'

This account of human nature, true as it is, would be a mere romance, if physical sensibility were the

only faculty essential to man, that is, if we were the slaves of voluptuous indolence. But our desires are kindled by their own heat, the will is urged on by a restless impulse, and without action, enjoyment becomes insipid. The passions of men are not in proportion only to their sensibility, or to the desirableness of the object, but to the violence and irritability of their tempers, and the obstacles to their success. Thus an object to which we were almost indifferent while we thought it in our power, often excites the most ardent pursuit or the most painful regret, as soon as it is placed out of our reach. How eloquently is the contradiction between our desires and our success described in *Don Quixote*, where it is said of the lover, that 'he courted a statue, hunted the wind, cried aloud to the desert!'

The necessity of action to the mind, and the keen edge it gives to our desires, is shown in the different value we set on past and future objects. It is commonly, and we might almost say universally, supposed, that there is an essential difference in the two cases. In this instance, however, the strength of our passions has converted an evident absurdity into one of the most inveterate prejudices of the human mind. That the future is really or in itself of more consequence than the past, is what we can neither assent to nor even conceive. It is true, the past has ceased to be, and is no longer anything, except to the mind; but the future is still to come, and has an existence in the mind only. The one is at an end, the other has not even had a beginning; both are purely ideal: so that this argument would prove that the present only is of any real value, and that both past and future objects are equally indifferent, alike nothing. Indeed, the future is, if possible, more imaginary than the past; for the past may in some sense be said to exist in its consequences; it acts still; it is present to us in its effects; the mouldering ruins and broken fragments still remain; but of the future there is no trace. What a blank does the history of the world

for the next six thousand years present to the mind, compared with that of the last? All that strikes the imagination, or excites any interest in the mighty scene is *what has been*. Neither in reality, then, nor as a subject of general contemplation, has the future any advantage over the past; but with respect to our own passions and pursuits it has. We regret the pleasures we have enjoyed, and eagerly anticipate those which are to come; we dwell with satisfaction on the evils from which we have escaped, and dread future pain. The good that is past is like money that is spent, which is of no use, and about which we give no further concern. The good we expect is like a store yet untouched, in the enjoyment of which we promise ourselves infinite gratification. What has happened to us we think of no consequence—what is to happen to us, of the greatest. Why so? Because the one is in our power, and the other not; because the efforts of the will to bring an object to pass or to avert it, strengthen our attachment to or our aversion from that object; because the habitual pursuit of any purpose redoubles the ardour of our pursuit, and converts the speculative and indolent interest we should otherwise take in it into real passion. Our regrets, anxiety, and wishes, are thrown away upon the past, but we encourage our disposition to exaggerate the importance of the future, as of the utmost use in aiding our resolutions and stimulating our exertions.

It in some measure confirms this theory, that men attach more or less importance to past and future events, according as they are more or else engaged in action and the busy scenes of life. Those who have a fortune to make, or are in pursuit of rank and power, are regardless of the past, for it does not contribute to their views: those who have nothing to do but to think, take nearly the same interest in the past as in the future. The contemplation of the one is as delightful and real as of the other. The season of hope comes to an end, but the remembrance of it

is left. The past still lives in the memory of those who have leisure to look back upon the way that they have trod, and can from it 'catch glimpses that may make them less forlorn.' The turbulence of action and uneasiness of desire *must* dwell upon the future; it is only amidst the innocence of shepherds, in the simplicity of the pastoral ages, that a tomb was found with this inscription—'I ALSO WAS AN ARCADIAN!'

We feel that some apology is necessary for having thus plunged our readers all at once into the middle of metaphysics. If it should be asked what use such studies are of, we might answer with Hume, *perhaps of none, except that there are certain persons who find more entertainment in them than in any other.* An account of this matter, with which we were amused ourselves, and which may therefore amuse others, we met with some time ago in a metaphysical allegory, which begins in this manner:

'In the depth of a forest, in the kingdom of Indostan, lived a monkey, who, before his last step of transmigration, had occupied a human tenement. He had been a Bramin, skilful in theology, and in all abstruse learning. He was wont to hold in admiration the ways of nature, and delighted to penetrate the mysteries in which she was enrobed; but in pursuing the footsteps of philosophy, he wandered too far from the abode of the social Virtues. In order to pursue his studies, he had retired to a cave on the banks of the Jumna. There he forgot society, and neglected ablution; and therefore his soul was degraded to a condition below humanity. So inveterate were the habits which he had contracted in his human state, that his spirit was still influenced by his passion for abstruse study. He sojourned in this wood from youth to age, regardless of everything, *save cocoa-nuts and metaphysics.*' For our own part, we should be content to pass our time much in the same manner as this learned savage, if we could only find a substitute for his cocoa-nuts! We do not, however, wish to recommend the same pursuit to others, nor

to dissuade them from it. It has its pleasures and its pains—its successes and its disappointments. It is neither quite so sublime nor quite so uninteresting as it is sometimes represented. The worst is, that much thought on difficult subjects tends, after a certain time, to destroy the natural gaiety and dancing of the spirits; it deadens the elastic force of the mind, weighs upon the heart, and makes us insensible to the common enjoyments and pursuits of life.

> 'Sithence no fairy lights, no quick'ning ray,
> Nor stir of pulse, nor objects to entice
> Abroad the spirits; but the cloyster'd heart
> Sits squat at home, like pagod in a niche
> Obscure.'

Metaphysical reasoning is also one branch of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The study of man, however, does, perhaps, less harm than a knowledge of the world, though it must be owned that the practical knowledge of vice and misery makes a stronger impression on the mind, when it has imbibed a habit of abstract reasoning. Evil thus becomes embodied in a general principle, and shows its harpy form in all things. It is a fatal, inevitable necessity hanging over us. It follows us wherever we go: if we fly into the uttermost parts of the earth, it is there: whether we turn to the right or the left, we cannot escape from it. This, it is true, is the disease of philosophy; but it is one to which it is liable in minds of a certain cast, after the first ardour of expectation has been disabused by experience, and the finer feelings have received an irrecoverable shock from the jarring of the world.

Happy are they who live in the dream of their own existence, and see all things in the light of their own minds; who walk by faith and hope; to whom the guiding star of their youth still shines from afar, and into whom the spirit of the world has not entered! They have not been 'hurt by the archers,' nor has the iron entered their souls. They live in the midst

of arrows and of death, unconscious of harm. The evil things come not nigh them. The shafts of ridicule pass unheeded by, and malice loses its sting. The example of vice does not rankle in their breasts, like the poisoned shirt of Nessus. Evil impressions fall off from them like drops of water. The yoke of life is to them light and supportable. The world has no hold on them. They are in it, not of it; and a dream and a glory is ever around them!

1815.

ESSAY VIII

ON MEANS AND ENDS

It is impossible to have things done without doing them. This seems a truism; and yet what is more common than to suppose that we shall find things done, merely by wishing it? To put the will for the deed is as usual in practice as it is contrary to common sense. There is, in fact, no absurdity, no contradiction, of which the will is not capable. This is, I think, more remarkable in the English than in any other people, in whom (to judge by what I discover in myself) the will bears great and disproportioned sway. We will a thing: we contemplate the end intensely, and think it done, neglecting the necessary means to accomplish it. The strong tendency of the mind towards it, the internal effort it makes to give being to the object of its idolatry, seems an adequate cause to produce the effect, and in a manner identified with it. This is more particularly the case in what relates to the *fine arts*, and will account for some phenomena of the national character. The English school is distinguished by what are called *ébauches*, rude, violent attempts at effect, and a total inattention to the details or delicacy of finishing. Now this, I think, proceeds, not exactly from grossness of perception, but from the wilfulness of our character; our desire to have things our own way, without any trouble or distraction of purpose. An object strikes us: we see and feel the whole effect. We wish to produce a likeness of it; but we want to transfer this impression to the canvas as it is conveyed to us, simultaneously and intuitively, that is, to stamp it

there at a blow, or otherwise we turn away with impatience and disgust, as if the means were an obstacle to the end, and every attention to the mechanical part of art were a deviation from our original purpose. We thus degenerate, after repeated failures, into a slovenly style of art; and that which was at first an undisciplined and irregular impulse becomes a habit, and then a theory. It seems strange that the love of the end should produce aversion to the means—but so it is; neither is it altogether unnatural. That which we are struck with, which we are enamoured of, is the general appearance and result; and it would certainly be most desirable to produce the effect in the same manner by a mere word or wish, if it were possible, without entering into any mechanical drudgery or minuteness of detail or dexterity of execution, which though they are essential and component parts of the work do not enter into our thoughts, and form no part of our contemplation. We may find it necessary, on a cool calculation to go through and learn these, but in so doing we only submit to necessity, and they are still a diversion to and a suspension of our purpose for the time, at least, unless practice gives that facility which almost identifies the two together, or makes the process an unconscious one. The end thus devours up the means, or our eagerness for the one, where it is strong and unchecked, is in proportion to our impatience of the other. We view an object at a distance that excites an inclination to visit it, which we do after many tedious steps and intricate ways; but if we could fly, we should never walk. The mind, however, has wings, though the body has not, and it is this that produces the contradiction in question. The first and strongest impulse of the mind is to produce any work at once and by the most energetic means; but as this cannot always be done, we should not neglect other more mechanical ones, but that delusions of passion overrule the convictions of the understanding, and what we strongly wish we

fancy to be possible and true. We are full of the effect we intend to produce, and imagine we have produced it, in spite of the evidence of our senses, and the suggestions of our friends. In fact, after a number of fruitless efforts and violent throes to produce an effect which we passionately long for, it seems an injustice not to have produced it; if we have not commanded success, we have done more, we have deserved it; we have copied nature or Titian in the spirit in which they ought to be copied, and we see them before us in our mind's eye; there is the look, the expression, the something or other which we chiefly aim at, and thus we persist and make fifty excuses to deceive ourselves and confirm our errors; or if the light breaks upon us through all the disguises of sophistry and self-love, it is so painful that we shut our eyes to it; the greater the mortification the more violent the effort to throw it off; and thus we stick to our determination, and end where we began. What makes me think that this is the process of our minds, and not merely rusticity or want of apprehension, is, that you will see an English artist admiring and thrown into raptures by the tucker of Titian's mistress, made up of an infinite number of little folds, but if he attempts to copy it, he proceeds to omit all these details, and dash it off by a single smear of his brush. This is not ignorance, or even laziness, but what is called jumping at a conclusion. It is, in a word, an overweening purpose. He sees the details, the varieties, and their effects, and he admires them; but he sees them with a glance of his eye, and as a wilful man must have his way, he would reproduce them by a single dash of the pencil. The mixing his colours, the putting in and out, the giving his attention to a minute break, or softening in the particular lights and shades, is a mechanical and everlasting operation, very different from the delight he feels in contemplating the effect of all this when properly and finely done. Such details are foreign to his refined taste, and some doubts arise in his mind

in the midst of his gratitude and his raptures, as to how Titian could resolve upon the drudgery of going through them, and whether it was not done by extreme facility of hand, and a sort of trick, abridging the mechanical labour. No one wrote or talked more enthusiastically about Titian's harmony of colouring than the late Mr. Barry, yet his own colouring was dead and dry; and if he had copied a Titian, he would have made it a mere splash, leaving out all that caused his wonder or admiration, after his English, or rather Irish fashion. We not only grudge the labour of beginning, but we give up, for the same reason, when we are near touching the goal of success; and to save a few last touches, leave a work unfinished, and an object unattained. The immediate process, the daily gradual improvement, the completion of parts giving us no pleasure, we strain at the whole result; we wish to have it done, and in our anxiety to have it off our hands, say it will do, and lose the benefit of all our labour by grudging a little pains, and not commanding a little patience. In a day or two, suppose a copy of a fine Titian would be as complete as we could make it: the prospect of this so enchants us that we skip the intermediate days, see no great use in going on with it, fancy that we may spoil it, and in order to have the job done, take it home with us, when we immediately see our error, and spend the rest of our lives in repenting that we did not finish it properly at the time. We see the whole nature of a picture at once; we only do a part: *Hinc illæ lachrymæ*. A French artist, on the contrary, has none of this uneasy, anxious feeling; of this desire to grasp the whole of his subject, and anticipate his good fortune at a blow; of this massing and concentrating principle. He takes the thing more easily and rationally. Suppose he undertakes to copy a picture, he looks at it and copies it bit by bit. He does not set off headlong without knowing where he is going, or plunge into all sorts of difficulties and absurdities, from impatience to begin and

thinking that 'no sooner said than done'; but takes time to consider, lays his plans, gets in his outline and his distances, and lays a foundation before he attempts a superstructure which he may have to pull to pieces again. He looks before he leaps, which is contrary to the true blindfold English principle; and I should think that we had invented this proverb from seeing so many fatal examples of the neglect of it. He does not make the picture all black or all white, because one part of it is so, and because he cannot alter an idea he has once got into his head, and must always run into extremes, but varies from green to red, from orange tawney to yellow, from grey to brown, according as they vary in the original: he sees no inconsistency or forfeiture of a principle in this, but a great deal of right reason, and indeed an absolute necessity, if he wishes to succeed in what he is about. This is the last thing an Englishman thinks of: he only wants to have his own way, though it ends in defeat and ruin: he sets about a thing which he had little prospect of accomplishing, and if he finds he can do it, gives it over and leaves the matter short of success, which is too agreeable an idea for him to indulge in. The French artist proceeds bit by bit. He takes one part, a hand, a piece of drapery, a part of the background, and finishes it carefully; then another, and so on to the end. He does not, from a childish impatience, when he is near the conclusion, destroy the effect of the whole by leaving some one part eminently defective, nor fly from what he is about to something else that catches his eye, neglecting the one and spoiling the other. He is constrained by mastery, by the mastery of common sense and pleasurable feeling. He is in no hurry to finish, for he has a satisfaction in the work, and touches and retouches, perhaps a single head, day after day and week after week, without repining, uneasiness, or apparent progress. The very lightness and indifference of his feelings renders him patient and laborious: an Englishman, whatever he is about or

undertakes is as if he was carrying a heavy load that oppresses both his body and mind, and which he is anxious to throw down. A Frenchman's hopes or fears are not excited to that pitch of intolerable agony that compels him, in mere compassion to himself to bring the question to a speedy issue, even to the loss of his object; he is calm, easy, and indifferent, and can take his time and make the most of his advantages with impunity. Pleased with himself, he is pleased with whatever occupies his attention nearly alike. It is the same to him whether he paints an angel or a joint-stool; it is the same to him whether it is landscape or history; it is he who paints it, that is sufficient. Nothing puts him out of conceit with his work, for nothing puts him out of conceit with himself. This self-complacency produces admirable patience and docility in certain particulars, besides charity and toleration towards others. I remember a ludicrous instance of this deliberate process, in a young French artist who was copying the *Titian's Mistress*, in the Louvre, some twenty years ago. After getting it in chalk-lines, one would think he would have been attracted to the face, that heaven of beauty which makes a sunshine in the shady place, or to some part of the poetry of the picture; instead of which he began to finish a square he had marked out in the right-hand corner of the picture. He set to work like a cabinetmaker or an engraver, and seemed to have no sympathy with the soul of the picture. Indeed, to a Frenchman there is no distinction between the great and little, the pleasurable and the painful; the utmost he arrives at a conception of is the indifferent and the light. Another young man, at the time I speak of, was for eleven weeks (I think it was) daily employed in making a blacklead pencil drawing of a small Leonardo; he sat cross-legged on a rail to do it, kept his hat on, rose up, went to the fire to warm himself, talked constantly of the excellence of the different masters—Titian for colour, Raphael for expression, Poussin for composition—all

being alike to him, provided there was a word to express it, for all he thought about was his own harangue ; and, having consulted some friend on his progress, he returned to 'perfectionate,' as he called it, his copy. This would drive an Englishman mad or stupid. The perseverance and the indifference, the labour without impulse, the attention to the parts in succession, and disregard of the whole together, are to him absolutely inconceivable. A Frenchman only exists in his present sensations, and provided he is left free to these as they arise, he cares about nothing farther, looking neither backward nor forward. With all this affectation and artifice, there is on this account a kind of simplicity and nature about them, after all. They lend themselves to the impression before them with good humour and good will, making it neither better nor worse than it is. The English overdo or underdo everything, and are either drunk or in despair. I do not speak of all Frenchmen or of all Englishmen, but of the most characteristic specimens of each class. The extreme slowness and methodical regularity of the French has arisen out of this indifference, and even frivolity (their usually-supposed natural character), for owing to it their laborious minuteness costs them nothing ; they have no strong impulses or ardent longings that urge them to the violation of rules, or hurry them away with a subject and with the interest belonging to it. Everything is matter of calculation, and measured beforehand, in order to assist their fluttering and their feebleness. When they get beyond the literal and the formal, and attempt the impressive and the grand, as in David's and Girardot's pictures, defend us from sublimity heaped on insipidity and petit-maitreism. You see a Frenchman in the Louvre copying the finest pictures, standing on one leg, with his hat on ; or after copying a Raphael, thinking David much finer, more truly one of themselves, more a combination of the Greek sculptor and the French posture-master. Even if a French artist fails, he is

not disconcerted; there is something else he excels in: if he cannot paint, he can dance! If an Englishman, save the mark! fails in anything, he thinks he can do nothing; enraged at the mention of his ability to do anything else, and at any consolation offered to him, he banishes all other thought but of his disappointment, and discarding hope from his breast, neither eats nor sleeps (it is well if he does not cut his throat), will not attend to any other thing in which he before took an interest and pride, and is in despair till he recovers his good opinion of himself in the point in which he has been disgraced, though, from his very anxiety and disorder of mind, he is incapacitated from applying to the only means of doing so, as much as if he were drunk with liquor, instead of with pride and passion. The character I have here drawn of an Englishman I am clear about, for it is the character of myself, and, I am sorry to add, no exaggerated one. As my object is to paint the varieties of human nature, and as I can have it best from myself, I will confess a weakness. I lately tried to copy a Titian (after many years' want of practice), in order to give a friend in England some idea of the picture. I floundered on for several days, but failed, as might be expected. My sky became overcast. Everything seemed of the colour of the paint I used. Nature was one great daub. I had no feeling left but a sense of want of power, and of an abortive struggle to do what I could not do. I was ashamed of being seen to look at the picture with admiration, as if I had no right to do so. I was ashamed even to have written or spoken about the picture or about art at all: it seemed a piece of presumption or affectation in me, whose whole notions and refinements on the subject ended in an inexcusable daub. Why did I think of attempting such a thing heedlessly, of exposing my presumption and incapacity? It was blotting from my memory, covering with a dark veil, all that I remembered of those pictures formerly, my hopes when young, my regrets since; it was wresting from

me one of the consolations of my life and of my declining years. I was even afraid to walk out by the barrier of Neuilly, or to recall to memory that I had ever seen the picture; all was turned to bitterness and gall: to feel anything but a sense of my own helplessness and absurdity seemed a want of sincerity, a mockery and a piece of injustice. The only comfort I had was in the excess of pain I felt; this was at least some distinction: I was not insensible on that side. No Frenchman, I thought, would regret the not copying a Titian so much as I did, or so far show the same value for it. Besides, I had copied this identical picture very well formerly. If ever I got out of this scrape, I had received a lesson, at least, not to run the same risk of gratuitous vexation again, or even to attempt what was uncertain and unnecessary.

It is the same in love and in literature. A man makes love without thinking of the chances of success, his own disabilities, or the character of his mistress; that is, without connecting means with ends, and consulting only his own will and passion. The author sets about writing history, with the full intention of rendering all documents, dates, and facts secondary to his own opinion and will. In business it is not altogether the same; for interest acts obviously as a counterpoise to caprice and will, and is the moving principle; nor is it so in war, for then the spirit of contradiction does everything, and an Englishman will go to the devil rather than give up to any odds. Courage is pure will without regard to consequences, and this the English have in perfection. Again, poetry is our element, for the essence of poetry is will and passion. The French poetry is detail and verbiage. I have thus shown why the English fail, as a people, in the Fine Arts, namely, because with them the end absorbs the means. I have mentioned Barry as an individual instance. No man spoke or wrote with more *gusto* about painting, and yet no one painted with less. His pictures were dry and coarse, and wanted all that his description of those of others

contained. For instance, he speaks of the dull, dead, watery look in the Medusa's head of Leonardo, which conveys a perfect idea of it: if he had copied it, you would never have suspected anything of the kind. Again, he has, I believe, somewhere spoken of the uneasy effect of the tucker of the *Titian's Mistress*, bursting with the full treasures it contains. What a daub he would have made of it! He is like a person admiring the grace of a fine rope-dancer; placed on the rope himself his head turns, and he falls: or like a man admiring fine horsemanship; set him upon a horse, and he tumbles over on the other side. Why was this? His mind was essentially ardent and discursive, not sensitive or observing; and though the immediate object acted as a stimulus to his imagination, it was only as it does to a poet's, that is, as a link in the chain of association, as suggesting other strong feelings and ideas, and not for its intrinsic beauty or hidden details. He had not the painter's eye though he had the painter's knowledge. There is as great a difference in this respect as between the telescope and microscope. People in general see objects only to distinguish them in practice and by name; to know that a hat is a hat, that a chair is not a table, that John is not William; and there are painters (particularly of history) in England who look no farther. They cannot finish anything, or go over a head twice; the first view is all they would arrive at; nor can they reduce their impressions to their component parts without losing the spirit. The effect of this is grossness and want of force; for in reality the component parts cannot be separated from the whole. Such people have no pleasure in the exercise of their art as such: it is all to astonish or to get money that they follow it; or if they are thrown out of it, they regret it only as a bankrupt does a business which was a livelihood to him. Barry did not live, like Titian, in the taste of colours; they were not a *pabulum* to his sense; he did not hold green, blue, red, and yellow as the precious darlings of his eye.

They did not therefore sink into his mind, or nourish and enrich it with the sense of beauty, though he knew enough of them to furnish hints and topics of discourse. If he had had the most beautiful object in nature before him in his painting-room in the Adelphi, he would have neglected it, after a moment's burst of admiration, to talk of his last composition, or to scrawl some new and vast design. Art was nothing to him, or if anything, merely a stalking-horse to his ambition and display of intellectual power in general; and therefore he neglected it to daub huge allegories, or cabal with the Academy, where the violence of his will or the extent of his views found ample scope. As a painter he was valuable merely as a draughtsman, in that part of the art which may be reduced to lines and precepts, or positive measurement. There is neither colour, nor expression, nor delicacy, nor beauty, in his works.

1827.

ESSAY IX

MATTER AND MANNER

NOTHING can frequently be more striking than the difference of style or manner, where the *matter* remains the same, as in paraphrases and translations. The most remarkable example which occurs to us is in the beginning of the *Flower and Leaf*, by Chaucer, and in the modernisation of the same passage by Dryden. We shall give an extract from both, that the reader may judge for himself. The original runs thus:

'And I that all this pleasaunt sight *ay* sie,
Thought sodainly I felte so sweet an aire
Con of the eglentere, that certainely
There is no heart, I deme, in such dispaire,
Ne with *no* thoughtes froward and contraire
So overlaid, but it shoulde soone have bote,
If it had ones felt this savour sote.

And as I stood and cast aside mine eie,
I was of ware the fairest medler tree,
That ever yet in all my life I sie,
As full of blossomes as it mighte be;
Therein a goldfinch leaping pretile
Fro bough to bough; and, as him list, *gan* eete
Of buddes here and there and floures sweete.

And to the herber side *ther* was joyninge
This faire tree, of which I have you told;
And at the last the brid began to singe,
When he had eaten what he eate wolde,
So passing sweetly, that by manifolde,
It was more pleasaunt than I coude devise.
And when his song was ended in this wise,

The nightingale with so mery a note
Answered him, that all the woode rong
So sodainly, that, as it were a sote,
I stood astonied; so was I with the song
Thorow ravished, that till late and longe,
Ne wist I in what place I was, ne where;
And ay, me thoughte, she song even by mine ere.

Wherefore about I waited busily,
On every side, if *that* I her mighte see;
And, at the last, I gan full well aspie
Where she sat in a fresh grene laurer tree,
On the further side, even right by me,
That gave so passing a delicious smell,
According to the eglentere full well.

Whereof I hadde so inly great pleasure,
That, as me thought, I surely ravished was
Into Paradice, where *as* my desire
Was for to be, and no ferther to passe
As for that day; and on the sote grasse
I sat me downe; for, as for mine entent,
The birddes song was more convenient,

And more pleasaunt to me by many fold,
Than meat or drinke, or any other thing.
Thereto the herber was so fresh and cold,
The wholesome savours eke so comforting
That, as I demede, sith the beginning
Of thilke world was never seene or than
So pleasaunt a ground of none earthly man

And as I sat, the birddes harkening thus,
Me thoughte that I hearde voices sodainly,
The most sweetest and most delicious
That ever any wight, I trow truly,
Heard in *here* life; for *sothe* the armony
And sweet accord was in so good musike,
That the voices to angels most was like.'

In this passage the poet has let loose the very soul of pleasure. There is a spirit of enjoyment in it, of which there seems no end. It is the intense delight which accompanies the description of every object, the fund of natural sensibility which it displays, which constitutes its whole essence and beauty. Now this is shown chiefly in the manner in which the different

objects are anticipated, and the eager welcome which is given to them; in his repeating and varying the circumstances with a restless delight; in his quitting the subject for a moment, and then returning to it again, as if he could never have his fill of enjoyment. There is little of this in Dryden's paraphrase. The same ideas are introduced, but not in the same manner, nor with the same spirit. The imagination of the poet is not borne along with the tide of pleasure —the verse is not poured out, like the natural strains it describes, from pure delight, but according to rule and measure. Instead of being absorbed in his subject, he is dissatisfied with it, tries to give an air of dignity to it by factitious ornaments, to amuse the reader by ingenious allusions, and divert his attention from the progress of the story by the artifices of the style:

'The painted birds, companions of the spring,
Hopping from spray to spray, were heard to sing.
Both eyes and ears receiv'd a like delight,
Enchanting music, and a charming sight.
On Philomel I fix'd my whole desire;
And listen'd for the queen of all the quire;
Fain would I hear her heavenly voice to sing;
And wanted yet an omen to the spring.
Thus as I mus'd I cast aside my eye,
And saw a medlar-tree was planted nigh.
The spreading branches made a goodly show,
And full of opening blooms was every bough:
A goldfinch there I saw with gawdy pride
Of painted plumes, that hopp'd from side to side,
Still pecking as she pass'd; and still she drew
The sweets from every flower and suck'd the dew:
Suffic'd at length, she warbled in her throat,
And tun'd her voice to many a merry note,
But indistinct, and neither sweet nor clear,
Yet such as sooth'd my soul, and pleas'd my ear.
Her short performance was no sooner tried,
When she I sought, the nightingale, replied:
So sweet, so shrill, so variously she sung,
That the grove echoed, and the valleys rung:
And I so ravish'd with her heavenly note,
I stood entranced, and had no room for thought.

But all o'erpower'd with ecstasy of bliss,
Was in a pleasing dream of paradise;
At length I wak'd, and looking round the bower,
Search'd every tree, and pry'd on every flower,
If any where by chance I might espy
The rural poet of the melody:
For still methought she sung not far away:
At last I found her on a laurel spray.
Close by my side she sat, and fair in sight,
Full in a line, against her opposite;
Where stood with eglantine the laurel twin'd;
And both their native sweets were well conjoin'd.
On the green bank I sat, and listen'd long
(Sitting was more convenient for the song);
Nor till her lay was ended could I move,
But wish'd to dwell for ever in the grove.
Only methought the time too swiftly pass'd,
And every note I fear'd would be the last.
My sight, and smell and hearing were employ'd,
And all three senses in full gust enjoy'd.
And what alone did all the rest surpass
The sweet possession of the fairy place;
Single, and conscious to myself alone
Of pleasures to the excluded world unknown:
Pleasures which no where else were to be found,
And all Elysium in a spot of ground.
Thus while I sat intent to see and hear,
And drew perfumes of more than vital air,
All suddenly I heard the approaching sound
Of vocal music on the enchanted ground:
A host of saints it seem'd, so full the quire;
As if the bless'd above did all conspire
To join their voices, and neglect the lyre.'

Compared with Chaucer, Dryden and the rest of that school were merely *verbal poets*. They had a great deal of wit, sense, and fancy; they only wanted truth and depth of feeling. But I shall have to say more on this subject, when I come to consider the old question which I have got marked down in my list, whether Pope was a poet.

Lord Chesterfield's character of the Duke of Marlborough is a good illustration of his general theory. He says, 'Of all the men I ever knew in my life (and I knew him extremely well) the late Duke of Marl-

borough possessed the graces in the highest degree, not to say engrossed them; for I will venture (contrary to the custom of profound historians, who always assign deep causes for great events) to ascribe the better half of the Duke of Marlborough's greatness and riches to those graces. He was eminently illiterate: wrote bad English, and spelt it worse. He had no share of what is commonly called parts; that is, no brightness, nothing shining in his genius. He had, most undoubtedly, an excellent good plain understanding, with sound judgment. But these alone would probably have raised him but something higher than they found him, which was page to King James II.'s Queen. There the graces protected and promoted him; for while he was Ensign of the Guards, the Duchess of Cleveland, then favourite mistress of Charles II., struck by these very graces, gave him five thousand pounds; with which he immediately bought an annuity of five hundred pounds a year, which was the foundation of his subsequent fortune. His figure was beautiful, but his manner was irresistible by either man or woman. It was by this engaging, graceful manner, that he was enabled during all his wars to connect the various and jarring powers of the grand alliance, and to carry them on to the main object of the war, notwithstanding their private and separate views, jealousies, and wrong-headedness. Whatever court he went to (and he was often obliged to go himself to some resty and refractory ones) he as constantly prevailed, and brought them into his measures.'

Grace in women has often more effect than beauty. We sometimes see a certain fine self-possession, an habitual voluptuousness of character, which reposes on its own sensations, and derives pleasure from all around it, that is more irresistible than any other attraction. There is an air of languid enjoyment in such persons, 'in their eyes, in their arms, and their hands, and their face,' which robs us of ourselves, and draws us by a secret sympathy towards them. Their

minds are a shrine where pleasure reposes. Their smile diffuses a sensation like the breath of spring. Petrarch's description of Laura answers exactly to this character, which is indeed the Italian character. Titian's pictures are full of it; they seem sustained by sentiment, or as if the persons whom he painted sat to music. There is one in the Louvre (or there was) which had the most of this expression I ever remember. It did not look downward; 'it looked forward beyond this world.' It was a look that never passed away, but remained unalterable as the deep sentiment which gave birth to it. It is the same constitutional character (together with infinite activity of mind) which has enabled the greatest man in modern history to bear his reverses of fortune with gay magnanimity, and to submit to the loss of the empire of the world with as little discomposure as if he had been playing a game at chess.

After all, I would not be understood to say that manner is everything.[1] Nor would I put Euclid or Sir Isaac Newton on a level with the first *petit-maître* we might happen to meet. I consider *Æsop's Fables* to have been a greater work of genius than Fontaine's translation of them; though I am not sure that I should not prefer Fontaine, for his style only, to Gay, who has shown a great deal of original invention. The elegant manners of people of fashion have

[1] Sheer impudence answers almost the same purpose. 'Those impenetrable whiskers have confronted flames.' Many persons, by looking big and talking loud, make their way through the world without any one good quality. I have here said nothing of mere personal qualifications, which are another set-off against sterling merit. Fielding was of opinion that 'the more solid pretensions of virtue and understanding vanish before perfect beauty.' 'A certain lady of a manor' (says *Don Quixote* in defence of his attachment to *Dulcinea*, which, however, was quite of the Platonic kind), 'had cast the eyes of affection on a certain squat, brawny lay brother of a neighbouring monastery, to whom she was lavish of her favours. The head of the order remonstrated with her on this preference shown to one whom he represented as a very low, ignorant fellow, and set forth the superior pretensions of

been objected to me, to show the frivolity of external accomplishments, and the facility with which they are acquired. As to the last point, I demur. There are no class of people who lead so laborious a life, or who take more pains to cultivate their minds as well as persons, than people of fashion. A young lady of quality who has to devote so many hours a day to music, so many to dancing, so many to drawing, so many to French, Italian, etc., certainly does not pass her time in idleness: and these accomplishments are afterwards called into action by every kind of external or mental stimulus, by the excitements of pleasure, vanity, and interest. A Ministerial or Opposition Lord goes through more drudgery than half-a-dozen literary hacks; nor does a reviewer by profession read half the same number of publications as a modern fine lady is obliged to labour through. I confess, however, I am not a competent judge of the degree of elegance or refinement implied in the general tone of fashionable manners. The successful experiment made by *Peregrine Pickle*, in introducing his strolling mistress into genteel company, does not redound greatly to their credit.

1815.

himself, and his more learned brethren. The lady having heard him to an end, made answer: All that you have said may be very true; but know that in those points which I admire, Brother Chrysostom is as great a philosopher, nay greater, than Aristotle himself!' So the *Wife of Bath*:

> 'To chirche was myn housbond brought on morwe
> With neighebors that for him made sorwe,
> And Jankyn oure clerk was oon of tho.
> As help me God, whan that I saugh him go
> After the beere, methought he had a paire
> Of legges and of feet so clene and faire,
> That al myn hert I yaf unto his hold.'

'All which, though we most potently believe, yet we hold it not honesty to have it thus set down.'

ESSAY X

ON CONSISTENCY OF OPINION

'—— Servetur ad imum
Qualis ab inceptu processerit, et sibi constet.'

Many people boast of being masters in their own house. I pretend to be master of my own mind. I should be sorry to have an ejectment served upon me for any notions I may choose to entertain there. Within that little circle I would fain be an absolute monarch. I do not profess the spirit of martyrdom; I have no ambition to march to the stake, or up to a masked battery, in defence of an hypothesis: I do not court the rack: I do not wish to be flayed alive for affirming that two and two make four, or any other intricate proposition: I am shy of bodily pains and penalties, which some are fond of—imprisonment, fine, banishment, confiscation of goods: but if I do not prefer the independence of my mind to that of my body, I at least prefer it to everything else. I would avoid the arm of power, as I would escape from the fangs of a wild beast: but as to the opinion of the world, I see nothing formidable in it. 'It is the eye of childhood that fears a painted devil.' I am not to be browbeat or wheedled out of any of my settled convictions. Opinion to opinion, I will face any man. Prejudice, fashion, the cant of the moment, go for nothing; and as for the reason of the thing, it can only be supposed to rest with me or another, in proportion to the pains we have taken to ascertain it. Where the pursuit of truth has been the habitual study of any man's life, the love of truth will be his

ruling passion. 'Where the treasure is, there the heart is also.' Every one is most tenacious of that to which he owes his distinction from others. Kings love power, misers gold, women flattery, poets reputation—and philosophers truth, when they can find it. They are right in cherishing the only privilege they inherit. If 'to be wise were to be obstinate,' I might set up for as great a philosopher as the best of them; for some of my conclusions are as fixed and as incorrigible to proof as need be. I am attached to them in consequence of the pains, and anxiety, and the waste of time they have cost me. In fact, I should not well know what to do without them at this time of day; nor how to get others to supply their place. I would quarrel with the best friend I have sooner than acknowledge the absolute right of the Bourbons. I see Mr. Northcote seldomer than I did, because I cannot agree with him about the *Catalogue Raisonné*. I remember once saying to this gentleman, a great while ago, that I did not seem to have altered any of my ideas since I was sixteen years old. 'Why then,' said he, 'you are no wiser now than you were then!' I might make the same confession, and the same retort would apply still. Coleridge used to tell me, that this pertinacity was owing to a want of sympathy with others. What he calls *sympathising with others* is their admiring him; and it must be admitted that he varies his battery pretty often, in order to accommodate himself to this sort of mutual understanding. But I do not agree in what he says of me. On the other hand, I think that it is my sympathising *beforehand* with the different views and feelings that may be entertained on a subject, that prevents me retracting my judgment, and flinging myself into the contrary extreme *afterwards*. If you proscribe all opinion opposite to your own, and impertinently exclude all the evidence that does not make for you, it stares you in the face with double force when it breaks in unexpectedly upon you, or if at any subsequent period it happens to suit your interest or convenience to listen

to objections which vanity or prudence had hitherto overlooked. But if you are aware from the first suggestion of a subject, either by subtlety, or tact, or close attention, of the full force of what others possibly feel and think of it, you are not exposed to the same vacillation of opinion. The number of grains and scruples, of doubts and difficulties, thrown into the scale while the balance is yet undecided, add to the weight and steadiness of the determination. He who anticipates his opponent's arguments, confirms while he corrects his own reasonings. When a question has been carefully examined in all its bearings, and a principle is once established, it is not liable to be overthrown by any new facts which have been arbitrarily and petulantly set aside, nor by every wind of idle doctrine rushing into the interstices of a hollow speculation, shattering it in pieces, and leaving it a mockery and a bye-word; like those tall, gawky, staring, pyramidal erections which are seen scattered over different parts of the country, and are called the *Follies* of different gentlemen! A man may be confident in maintaining a side, as he has been cautious in choosing it. If after making up his mind strongly in one way, to the best of his capacity and judgment, he feels himself inclined to a very violent revulsion of sentiment, he may generally rest assured that the change is in himself and his motives, not in the reason of things.

I cannot say that, from my own experience, I have found that the persons most remarkable for sudden and violent changes of principle have been cast in the softest or most susceptible mould. All their notions have been exclusive, bigoted, and intolerant. Their want of consistency and moderation has been in exact proportion to their want of candour and comprehensiveness of mind. Instead of being the creatures of sympathy, open to conviction, unwilling to give offence by the smallest difference of sentiment, they have (for the most part) been made up of mere antipathies—a very repulsive sort of personages—at odds with them-

selves, and with everybody else. The slenderness of their pretensions to philosophical inquiry has been accompanied with the most presumptuous dogmatism. They have been persons of that narrowness of view and headstrong self-sufficiency of purpose, that they could see only one side of a question at a time, and whichever they pleased. There is a story somewhere in *Don Quixote*, of two champions coming to a shield hung up against a tree with an inscription written on each side of it. Each of them maintained, that the words were what was written on the side next him, and never dreamt, till the fray was over, that they might be different on the opposite side of the shield. It would have been a little more extraordinary if the combatants had changed sides in the heat of the scuffle, and stoutly denied that there were any such words on the opposite side as they had before been bent on sacrificing their lives to prove were the only ones it contained. Yet such is the very situation of some of our modern polemics. They have been of all sides of the question, and yet they cannot conceive how an honest man can be of any but one—that which they hold at present. It seems that they are afraid to look their old opinions in the face, lest they should be fascinated by them once more. They banish all doubts of their own sincerity by inveighing against the motives of their antagonists. There is no salvation out of the pale of their strange inconsistency. They reduce common sense and probity to the straitest possible limits—the breasts of themselves and their patrons. They are like people out at sea on a very narrow plank, who try to push everybody else off. Is it that they have so little faith in the course to which they have become such staunch converts, as to suppose that, should they allow a grain of sense to their old allies and new antagonists, they will have more than they? Is it that they have so little consciousness of their own disinterestedness, that they feel, if they allow a particle of honesty to those who now differ with them, they will have more than they? Those

opinions must needs be of a very fragile texture which will not stand the shock of the least acknowledged opposition, and which lay claim to respectability by stigmatising all who do not hold them as 'sots, and knaves, and cowards.' There is a want of well-balanced feeling in every such instance of extravagant versatility; a something crude, unripe, and harsh, that does not hit a judicious palate, but sets the teeth on edge to think of. 'I had rather hear my mother's cat mew, or a wheel grate on the axletree, than one of these same metre-ballad-mongers' chaunt his incondite, retrograde lays, without rhyme and without reason.

The principles and professions change: the man remains the same. There is the same spirit at the bottom of all this pragmatical fickleness and virulence, whether it runs into one extreme or another: to wit, a confinement of view, a jealousy of others, an impatience of contradiction, a want of liberality in construing the motives of others, either from monkish pedantry, or a conceited overweening reference of everything to our own fancies and feelings. There is something to be said, indeed, for the nature of the political machinery, for the whirling motion of the revolutionary wheel which has of late wrenched men's understandings almost asunder, and 'amazed the very faculties of eyes and ears'; but still this is hardly a sufficient reason, why the adept in the old as well as the new school should take such a prodigious latitude himself, while at the same time he makes so little allowance for others. His whole creed need not be turned topsy-turvy, from the top to the bottom, even in times like these. He need not, in the rage of party spirit, discard the proper attributes of humanity, the common dictates of reason. He need not outrage every former feeling, nor trample on every customary decency, in his zeal for reform, or in his greater zeal against it. If his mind, like his body, has undergone a total change of essence, and purged off the taint of all its early opinions, he need not carry about with

him, or be haunted in the persons of others with, the phantoms of his altered principles to loathe and execrate them. He need not (as it were) pass an act of attainder on all his thoughts, hopes, wishes, from youth upwards, to offer them at the shrine of matured servility: he need not become one vile antithesis, a living and ignominious satire on himself.

A gentleman went to live, some years ago, in a remote part of the country, and as he did not wish to affect singularity, he used to have two candles on his table of an evening. A romantic acquaintance of his in the neighbourhood, smit with the love of simplicity and equality, used to come in, and without ceremony snuff one of them out, saying, it was a shame to indulge in such extravagance, while many poor cottagers had not even a rushlight to see to do their evening's work by. This might be about the year 1802, and was passed over as among the ordinary occurrences of the day. In 1816 (oh! fearful lapse of time, pregnant with strange mutability) the same enthusiastic lover of economy, and hater of luxury, asked his thoughtless friend to dine with him in company with a certain lord, and to lend him his man-servant to wait at table; and just before they were sitting down to dinner, he heard him say to the servant in a sonorous whisper—'and be sure you don't forget to have six candles on the table!' Extremes meet. The event here was as true to itself as the oscillation of the pendulum. My informant, who understands moral equations, had looked for this reaction, and noted it down as characteristic. The impertinence in the first instance was the cue to the ostentatious servility in the second. The one was the fulfilment of the other, like the type and anti-type of a prophecy. No—the keeping of the character at the end of fourteen years was as unique as the keeping of the thought to the end of the fourteen lines of a sonnet! Would it sound strange if I were to whisper it in the reader's ear, that it was the same person who was thus anxious to see six candles on the table to

receive a lord, who once (in ages past) said to me, that 'he saw nothing to admire in the eloquence of such men as Mansfield and Chatham; and what did it all end in, but their being made lords?' It is better to be a lord than a lacquey to a lord! So we see that the swelling pride and preposterous self-opinion which exalts itself above the mightiest, looking down upon and braving the boasted pretensions of the highest rank and the most brilliant talents as nothing, compared with its own conscious powers and silent unmoved self-respect, grovels and licks the dust before titled wealth, like a lacquered slave, the moment it can get wages and a livery! Would Milton or Marvel have done this?

Mr. Coleridge, indeed, sets down this outrageous want of keeping to an excess of sympathy, and there is, after all, some truth in his suggestion. There is a craving after the approbation and concurrence of others natural to the mind of man. It is difficult to sustain the weight of an opinion singly for any length of way. The intellect languishes without cordial encouragement and support. It exhausts both strength and patience to be always striving against the stream. *Contra audentior ito* is the motto but of few. Public opinion is always pressing upon the mind, and, like the air we breathe, acts unseen, unfelt. It supplies the living current of our thoughts, and infects without our knowledge. It taints the blood, and is taken into the smallest pores. The most sanguine constitutions are, perhaps, the most exposed to its influence. But public opinion has its source in power, in popular prejudice, and is not always in accord with right reason, or a high and abstracted imagination. Which path to follow where the two roads part? The heroic and romantic resolution prevails at first in high and heroic tempers. They think to scale the heights of truth and virtue at once with him 'whose genius had angelic wings, and fed on manna,'—but after a time find themselves baffled, toiling on in an uphill road, without friends, in a

cold neighbourhood, without aid or prospect of success. The poet

'Like a worm goes by the way.'

He hears murmurs loud or suppressed, meets blank looks or scowling faces, is exposed to the pelting of the pitiless press, and is stunned by the shout of the mob, that gather round him to see what sort of a creature a poet and a philosopher is. What is there to make him proof against all this? A strength of understanding steeled against temptation, and a dear love of truth that smiles opinion to scorn. These he perhaps has not. A lord passes in his coach. Might he not get up, and ride out of the reach of the rabble-rout? He is invited to stop dinner. If he stays he might insinuate some wholesome truths. He drinks in rank poison—flattery! He recites some verses to the ladies, who smile delicious praise, and thank him through their tears. The master of the house suggests a happy allusion in the turn of an expression. 'There's sympathy.' This is better than the company he lately left. Pictures, statues meet his raptured eye. Our Ulysses finds himself in the gardens of Alcinous: our truant is fairly caught. He wanders through enchanted ground. Groves, classic groves, nod unto him, and he hears 'ancestral voices' hailing him as brother bard! He sleeps, dreams, and wakes cured of his thriftless prejudices and morose philanthropy. He likes this courtly and popular sympathy better. 'He looks up with awe to kings; with honour to nobility; with reverence to magistrates,' etc. He no longer breathes the air of heaven and his own thoughts, but is steeped in that of palaces and courts, and finds it agree better with his constitutional temperament. Oh! how sympathy alters a man from what he was!

'I've heard of hearts unkind,
Kind deeds with cold returning;
Alas! the gratitude of man
Has oftener set me mourning.'

A spirit of contradiction, a wish to monopolise all wisdom, will not account for uniform consistency, for it is sure to defeat and turn against itself. It is 'everything by turns, and nothing long.' It is warped and crooked. It cannot bear the least opposition, and sooner than acquiesce in what others approve it will change sides in a day. It is offended at every resistance to its captious, domineering humour, and will quarrel for straws with its best friends. A person under the guidance of this demon, if every whimsy or occult discovery of his own is not received with acclamation by one party, will wreak his spite by deserting to the other, and carry all his talent for disputation with him, sharpened by rage and disappointment. A man, to be steady in a cause, should be more attached to the truth than to the acquiescence of his fellow citizens.

I can hardly consider Mr. Coleridge a deserter from the cause he first espoused, unless one could tell what cause he ever heartily espoused, or what party he ever belonged to, in downright earnest. He has not been inconsistent with himself at different times, but at all times. He is a sophist, a casuist, a rhetorician, what you please, and might have argued or declaimed to the end of his breath on one side of a question or another, but he never was a pragmatical fellow. He lived in a round of contradictions, and never came to a settled point. His fancy gave the cue to his judgment, and his vanity set his invention afloat in whatever direction he could find most scope for it, or most *sympathy*, that is, admiration. His Life and Opinions might naturally receive the title of one of Hume's Essays—*A Sceptical Solution of Sceptical Doubts*. To be sure, his *Watchman* and his *Friend* breathe a somewhat different tone on subjects of a particular description, both of them apparently pretty high-raised, but whoever will be at the pains to examine them closely, will find them to be *voluntaries*, fugues, solemn capriccios, not set compositions with any malice prepense in them, or much practical

meaning. I believe some of his friends, who were indebted to him for the suggestion of plausible reasons for conformity, and an opening to a more qualified view of the letter of their paradoxical principles, have lately disgusted him by the virulence and extravagance to which they have carried hints, of which he never suspected that they would make the least possible use. But if Mr. Coleridge is satisfied with the wandering Moods of his Mind, perhaps this is no reason that others may not reap the solid benefit. He himself is like the idle seaweed on the ocean, tossed from shore to shore: they are like barnacles fastened to the vessel of state, rotting its goodly timbers!

There are some persons who are of too fastidious a turn of mind to like anything long, or to assent twice to the same opinion. —— always sets himself to prop the falling cause, to nurse the rickety bantling. He takes the part which he thinks in most need of his support, not so much out of magnanimity, as to prevent too great a degree of presumption or self-complacency on the triumphant side. 'Though truth be truth, yet he contrives to throw such changes of vexation on it as it may lose some colour.' I have been delighted to hear him expatiate with the most natural and affecting simplicity on a favourite passage or picture, and all the while afraid of agreeing with him, lest he should instantly turn round and unsay all that he had said, for fear of my going away with too good an opinion of my own taste, or too great an admiration of my idol—and his own. I dare not ask his opinion twice, if I have got a favourable sentence once, lest he should belie his own sentiments to stagger mine. I have heard him talk divinely (like one inspired) of Boccaccio, and the story of the Pot of Basil, describing 'how it grew, and it grew, and it grew,' till you saw it spread its tender leaves in the light of his eye, and wave in the tremulous sound of his voice; and yet if you asked him about it another time, he would, perhaps, affect to think little of it, or to have forgotten the circumstance. His enthusiasm

is fickle and treacherous. The instant he finds it shared in common, he backs out of it. His enmity is equally refined, but hardly so unsocial. His exquisitely-turned invectives display all the beauty of scorn, and impart elegance to vulgarity. He sometimes finds out minute excellences, and cries up one thing to put you out of conceit with another. If you want him to praise Sir Joshua *con amore*, in his best manner, you should begin with saying something about Titian—if you seem an idoliser of Sir Joshua, he will immediately turn off the discourse, gliding like the serpent before Eve, wary and beautiful, to the graces of Sir Peter Lely, or ask if you saw a Vandyke the other day, which he does not think Sir Joshua could stand near. But find fault with the Lake Poets, and mention some pretended patron of rising genius, and you need not fear but he will join in with you and go all lengths that you can wish him. You may calculate upon him there. 'Pride elevates, and joy brightens his face.' And, indeed, so eloquent is he, and so beautiful in his eloquence, that I myself, with all my freedom from gall and bitterness, could listen to him untired, and without knowing how the time went, losing and neglecting many a meal and hour,

> ——'From morn to noon,
> From noon to dewy eve, a summer's day.'

When I cease to hear him quite, other tongues, turned to what accents they may of praise or blame, would sound dull, ungrateful, out of tune, and harsh, in the comparison.

An overstrained enthusiasm produces a capriciousness in taste, as well as too much indifference. A person who sets no bounds to his admiration takes a surfeit of his favourites. He overdoes the thing. He gets sick of his own everlasting praises, and affected raptures. His preferences are a great deal too violent to last. He wears out an author in a week, that might last him a year, or his life, by the eagerness with which he devours him. Every such

favourite is in his turn the greatest writer in the world. Compared with the lord of the ascendent for the time being, Shakspeare is commonplace, and Milton a pedant, a little insipid or so. Some of these prodigies require to be dragged out of their lurking-places, and cried up to the top of the compass; their traits are subtle, and must be violently obtruded on the sight. But the effort of exaggerated praise, though it may stagger others, tires the maker, and we hear of them no more after a while. Others take their turns, are swallowed whole, undigested, ravenously, and disappear in the same manner. Good authors share the fate of bad, and a library in a few years is nearly dismantled. It is a pity thus to outlive our admiration, and exhaust our relish of what is excellent. Actors and actresses are disposed of in the same conclusive peremptory way: some of them are talked of for months, nay, years; then it is almost an offence to mention them. Friends, acquaintance, go the same road: are now asked to come six days in the week, then warned against coming the seventh. The smallest faults are soon magnified in those we think too highly of: but where shall we find perfection? If we will put up with nothing short of that, we shall have neither pictures, books, nor friends left—we shall have nothing but our own absurdities to keep company with! 'In all things a regular and moderate indulgence is the best security for a lasting enjoyment.'

There are numbers who judge by the event, and change with fortune. They extol the hero of the day, and join the prevailing clamour, whatever it is; so that the fluctuating state of public opinion regulates their feverish, restless enthusiasm, like a thermometer. They blow hot or cold, according as the wind sets favourably or otherwise. With such people the only infallible test of merit is success; and no arguments are true that have not a large or powerful majority on their side. They go by appearances. Their vanity, not the truth, is their ruling object. They are not

the last to quit a falling cause, and they are the first to hail the rising sun. Their minds want sincerity, modesty, and keeping. With them—

> ——'To have done is to hang
> Quite out of fashion, like a rusty mail
> In monumental mockery.'

They still, 'with one consent, praise new-born gauds,' and Fame, as they construe it, is

> ——'Like a fashionable host,
> That slightly shakes his parting guest by the hand;
> And with his arms outstretch'd, as he would fly,
> Grasps the in comer. Welcome ever smiles,
> And Farewell goes out sighing.'

Such servile flatterers made an idol of Buonaparte while fortune smiled upon him, but when it left him, they removed him from his pedestal in the cabinet of their vanity, as we take down the picture of a relation that has died without naming us in his will. The opinion of such triflers is worth nothing; it is merely an echo. We do not want to be told the event of a question, but the rights of it. Truth is in their theory nothing but 'noise and inexplicable dumb show.' They are the heralds, outriders, and trumpeters in the procession of fame; are more loud and boisterous than the rest, and give themselves great airs, as the avowed patrons and admirers of genius and merit. As there are many who change their sentiments with circumstances (as they decided lawsuits in Rabelais with the dice), so there are others who change them with their acquaintance. 'Tell me your company, and I'll tell you your opinions,' might be said to many a man who piques himself on a select and superior view of things, distinct from the vulgar. Individuals of this class are quick and versatile, but they are not beforehand with opinion. They catch it, when it is pointed out to them, and take it at the rebound, instead of giving the first impulse. Their minds are a light, luxuriant soil, into which thoughts are easily transplanted, and shoot up with uncommon sprightliness and vigour. They wear the dress of other

people's minds very gracefully and unconsciously. They tell you your own opinion, or very gravely repeat an observation you have made to them about half a year afterwards. They let you into the delicacies and luxuries of Spenser with great disinterestedness, in return for your having introduced that author to their notice. They prefer West to Raphael, Stothard to Rubens, till they are told better. Still they are acute in the main, and good judges in their way. By trying to improve their tastes, and reform their notions according to an ideal standard, they perhaps spoil and muddle their native faculties, rather than do them any good. Their first manner is their best, because it is the most natural. It is well not to go out of ourselves, and to be contented to take up with what we are, for better for worse. We can neither beg, borrow, nor steal characteristic excellences. Some views and modes of thinking suit certain minds, as certain colours suit certain complexions. We may part with very shining and very useful qualities, without getting better ones to supply them. Mocking is catching, only in regard to defects. Mimicry is always dangerous.

It is not necessary to change our road in order to advance on our journey. We should cultivate the spot of ground we possess to the utmost of our power, though it may be circumscribed and comparatively barren. *A rolling stone gathers no moss.* People may collect all the wisdom they will ever attain, quite as well by staying at home as by travelling abroad. There is no use in shifting from place to place, from side to side, or from subject to subject. You have always to begin again, and never finish any course of study or observation. By adhering to the same principles you do not become stationary. You enlarge, correct, and consolidate your reasonings, without contradicting and shuffling about in your conclusions. If truth consisted in hasty assumptions and petulant contradictions, there might be some ground for this whiffling and violent inconsistency. But the face of truth, like that of nature, is different and the same.

The first outline of an opinion, and the general tone of thinking, may be sound and correct, though we may spend any quantity of time and pains in working up and uniting the parts at subsequent sittings. If we have misconceived the character of the countenance altogether at first, no alterations will bring it right afterwards. Those who mistake white for black in the first instance, may as well mistake black for white when they reverse their canvas. I do not see what security they can have in their present opinions, who build their pretensions to wisdom on the total folly, rashness, and extravagance (to say no worse) of their former ones. The perspective may change with years and experience: we may see certain things nearer, and others more remote; but the great masses and landmarks will remain, though thrown into shadow and tinged by the intervening atmosphere: so the laws of the understanding, the truth of nature, will remain, and cannot be thrown into utter confusion and perplexity by our blunders or caprice, like the objects in Hogarth's *Rules of Perspective*, where everything is turned upside down, or thrust out of its well-known place. I cannot understand how our political Harlequins feel after all their summersaults and metamorphoses. They can hardly, I should think, look at themselves in the glass, or walk across the room without stumbling. This at least would be the case if they had the least reflection or self-knowledge. But they judge from pique and vanity solely. There should be a certain decorum in life, as in a picture, without which it is neither useful nor agreeable. If my opinions are not right, at any rate they are the best I have been able to form, and better than any others I could take up at random, or out of perversity, now. Contrary opinions vitiate one another, and destroy the simplicity and clearness of the mind: nothing is good that has not a beginning, a middle, and an end; and I would wish my thoughts to be

'Linked each to each by natural piety.'

1821.

ESSAY XI

PROJECT FOR A NEW THEORY OF CIVIL AND CRIMINAL LEGISLATION

When I was about fourteen (as long ago as the year 1792), in consequence of a dispute, one day after coming out of meeting, between my father and an old lady of the congregation, respecting the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts and the limits of religious toleration, I set about forming in my head (the first time I ever attempted to think) the following system of political rights and general jurisprudence.

It was this circumstance that decided the fate of my future life; or rather, I would say it was from an original bias or craving to be satisfied of the reason of things, that I seized hold of this accidental opportunity to indulge in its uneasy and unconscious determination. Mr. Currie, my old tutor at Hackney, may still have the rough draught of this speculation, which I gave him with tears in my eyes, and which he good-naturedly accepted in lieu of the customary *themes*, and as a proof that I was no idler, but that my inability to produce a line on the ordinary school topics arose from my being involved in more difficult and abstruse matters. He must smile at the so oft-repeated charge against me of florid flippancy and tinsel. If from those briars I have since plucked roses, what labour has it not cost me? The Test and Corporation Acts were repealed the other day. How would my father have rejoiced if this had happened in his time, and in concert with his old friends Dr. Price, Dr. Priestly, and others! but now that there is no one to care about it, they give as a boon to

indifference what they so long refused to justice, and thus ascribed by some to the liberality of the age! Spirit of contradiction! when wilt thou cease to rule over sublunary affairs, as the moon governs the tides? Not till the unexpected stroke of a comet throws up a new breed of men and animals from the bowels of the earth; nor then neither, since it is included in the very idea of all life, power, and motion. *For* and *against* are inseparable terms. But not to wander any farther from the point—

I began with trying to define what a *right* meant; and this I settled with myself was not simply that which is good or useful in itself, but that which is thought so by the individual, and which has the sanction of his will as such. 1. Because the determining what is good in itself is an endless question. 2. Because one person's having a right to any good, and another being made the judge of it, leaves him without any security for its being exercised to his advantage, whereas self-love is a natural guarantee for our self-interest. 3. A thing being willed is the most absolute moral reason for its existence: that a thing is good in itself is no reason whatever why it should exist, till the will clothes it with a power to act as a motive; and there is certainly nothing to prevent this will from taking effect (no law or admitted plea above it) but another will opposed to it, and which forms a right on the same principle. A good is only so far a right, inasmuch as it virtually determines the will; for a *right* meant that which contains within itself, and as respects the bosom in which it is lodged, a cogent and unanswerable reason why it should exist. Suppose I have a violent aversion to one thing and as strong an attachment to something else, and that there is no other being in the world but myself, shall I not have a self-evident right, full title, liberty, to pursue the one and avoid the other? That is to say, in other words, there can be no authority to interpose between the strong natural tendency of the will and its desired effect, but the will of another. It may be

replied that reason, that affection, may interpose between the will and the act; but there are motives that influence the conduct by first altering the will; and the point at issue is, that these being away, what other principle or lever is there always left to appeal to, before we come to blows? Now, such a principle is to be found in self-interest; and such a barrier against the violent will is erected by the limits which this principle necessarily sets to itself in the claims of different individuals. Thus, then, a right is not that which is right in itself, or best for the whole, or even for the individual, but that which is good in his own eyes, and according to his own will; and to which, among a number of equally selfish and self-willed beings, he can lay claim, allowing the same latitude and allowance to others. Political justice is that which assigns the limits of these individual rights in society, or it is the adjustment of force against force, of will against will, to prevent worse consequences. In the savage state there is nothing but an appeal to brute force, or the right of the strongest; Politics lays down a rule to curb and measure out the wills of individuals in equal portions; Morals has a higher standard still, and ought never to appeal to force in any case whatever. Hence I always found something wanting in Mr. Godwin's *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (which I read soon after with great avidity, and hoped, from its title and its vast reputation, to get entire satisfaction from it), for he makes no distinction between political justice, which implies an appeal to force, and moral justice, which implies only an appeal to reason. It is surely a distinct question, what you can persuade people to do by argument and fair discussion, and what you may lawfully compel them to do, when reason and remonstrance fail. But in Mr. Godwin's system the 'omnipotence of reason' supersedes the use of law and government, merges the imperfection of the means in the grandeur of the end, and leaves but one class of ideas or motives, the highest and the least attainable possible. So promises

and oaths are said to be of no more value than common breath; nor would they, if every word we uttered was infallible and oracular, as if delivered from a Tripod. But this is pragmatical, and putting an imaginary for a real state of things. Again, right and duties, according to Mr. Godwin, are reciprocal. I could not comprehend this without an arbitrary definition that took away the meaning. In my sense, a man might have a right, a discriminating power, to do something, which others could not deprive him of, without a manifest infraction of certain rules laid down for the peace and order of society, but which it might be his duty to waive upon good reasons shown; rights are seconded by force, duties are things of choice. This is the import of the words in common speech: why then pass over this distinction in a work confessedly rhetorical as well as logical, that is, which laid an equal stress on sound and sense? Right, therefore, has a personal or selfish reference, as it is founded on the law which determines a man's actions in regard to his own being and well-being; and political justice is that which assigns the limits of these individual rights on their compatibility or incompatibility with each other in society. Right, in a word, is the duty which each man owes to himself; or it is that portion of the general good of which (as being principally interested) he is made the special judge, and which is put under his immediate keeping.

The next question I asked myself was, what is law and the real and necessary ground of civil government? The answer to this is found in the former statement. *Law* is something to abridge, or, more properly speaking, to ascertain, the bounds of the original right, and to coerce the will of individuals in the community. Whence, then, has the community such a right? It can only arise in self-defence, or from the necessity of maintaining the equal rights of every one, and of opposing force to force in case of any violent and unwarrantable infringement of them. Society consists of a given number of individuals; and

the aggregate right of government is only the consequence of these inherent rights, balancing and neutralising one another. How those who deny natural rights get at any sort of right, divine or human, I am at a loss to discover; for whatever exists in combination, exists beforehand in an elementary state. The world is composed of atoms, and a machine cannot be made without materials. First, then, it follows that law or government is not the mere creature of a social compact, since each person has a certain right which he is bound to defend against another without asking that other's leave, or else the right would always be at the mercy of whoever chose to invade it. There would be a right to do wrong, but none to resist it. Thus I have a natural right to defend my life against a murderer, without any mutual compact between us; hence society has an aggregate right of the same kind, and to make a law to that effect, forbidding and punishing murder. If there be no such immediate value and attachment to life felt by the individual, and a consequent justifiable determination to defend it, then the formal pretension of society to vindicate a right, which, according to this reasoning, has no existence in itself, must be founded on air, on a word, or a lawer's *ipse dixit*. Secondly, society, or government, as such, has no right to trench upon the liberty or rights of the individuals its members, except as these last are, as it were, forfeited by interfering with and destroying one another, like opposite mechanical forces or quantities in arithmetic. Put the basis that each man's will is a sovereign law to itself: this can only hold in society as long as he does not meddle with others; but so long as he does not do this, the first principle retains its force, for there is no other principle to impeach or overrule it. The will of society is not a sufficient plea; since this is, or ought to be, made up of the wills or rights of the individuals composing it, which by the supposition remain entire, and consequently without power to act. The good of society

is not a sufficient plea, for individuals are only bound (on compulsion) not to do it harm, or to be barely just: benevolence and virtue are voluntary qualities. For instance, if two persons are obliged to do all that is possible for the good of both, this must either be settled voluntarily between them, and then it is friendship, and not force; or if this is not the case, it is plain that one must be the slave, and lie at the caprice and mercy of the other: it will be one will forcibly regulating two bodies. But if each is left master of his own person and actions, with only the implied proviso of not encroaching on those of the other, then both may continue free and independent, and contented in their several spheres. One individual has no right to interfere with the employment of my muscular powers, or to put violence on my person, to force me to contribute to the most laudable undertaking if I do not approve of it, any more than I have to force him to assist me in the direct contrary: if one has not, ten have not, nor a million, any such arbitrary right over me. What one can be *made* to do for a million is very trifling: what a million may do by being left free in all that merely concerns themselves, and not subject to the perpetual caprice and insolence of authority, and pretext of the public good, is a very different calculation. By giving up the principle of political independence, it is not the million that will govern the one, but the one that will in time give law to the million. There are some things that cannot be free in natural society, and against which there is a natural law; for instance, no one can be allowed to knock out another's brains or to fetter his limbs with impunity. And government is bound to prevent the same violations of liberty and justice. The question is, whether it would not be possible for a government to exist, and for a system of laws to be framed, that confined itself to the punishment of such offences, and left all the rest (except the suppression of force by force) optional or matter of mutual compact. What are a man's natural

rights? Those, the infringement of which cannot on any supposition go unpunished: by leaving all but cases of necessity to choice and reason, much would be perhaps gained, and nothing lost.

Corollary 1. It results from the foregoing statement, that there is nothing naturally to restrain or oppose the will of one man, but the will of another meeting it. Thus, in a desert island, it is evident that my will and rights would be absolute and unlimited, and I might say with Robinson Crusoe, 'I am monarch of all I survey.'

Corollary 2. It is coming into society that circumscribes my will and rights, by establishing equal and mutual rights, instead of the original uncircumscribed ones. They are still 'founded as the rock,' though not so broad and general as the casing air, for the only thing that limits them is the solidity of another right, no better than my own, and, like stones in a building, or a mosaic pavement, each remains not the less firmly riveted to its place, though it cannot encroach upon the next to it. I do not belong to the state, nor am I a nonentity in it, but I am one part of it, and independent in it, for that very reason that every one in it is independent of me. Equality, instead of being destroyed by society, results from and is improved by it; for in politics, as in physics, the action and reaction are the same: the right of resistance on their part implies the right of self-defence on mine. In a theatre, each person has a right to his own seat, by the supposition that he has no right to intrude into any one else's. They are convertible propositions. Away, then, with the notion that liberty and equality are inconsistent. But here is the artifice: by merging the rights and independence of the individual in the fictitious order of society, those rights become arbitrary, capricious, equivocal, removable at the pleasure of the state or ruling power; there is nothing substantial or durable implied in them: if each has no positive claim, naturally, those of all taken together can mount up to nothing; right and justice are mere

blanks to be filled up with arbitrary will, and the people have thenceforward no defence against the government. On the other hand, suppose these rights to be not empty names or artificial arrangements, but original and inherent like solid atoms, then it is not in the power of government to annihilate one of them, whatever may be the confusion arising from their struggle for mastery, or before they can settle into order and harmony. Mr. Burke talks of the reflections and refractions of the rays of light as altering their primary essence and direction. But if there were no original rays of light, there could be neither refraction, nor reflections. Why, then, does he try by cloudy sophistry to blot the sun out of heaven? One body impinges against and impedes another in the fall, but it could not do this, but for the principle of gravity. The author of the *Sublime and Beautiful* would have a single atom outweigh the great globe itself; or an empty title, a bloated privilege, or a grievous wrong overturn the entire mass of truth and justice. The question between the author and his opponents appears to be simply this: whether politics, or the general good, is an affair of reason or imagination! and this seems decided by another consideration, viz. that Imagination is the judge of individual things, and Reason of generals. Hence the great importance of the principle of universal suffrage; for if the vote and choice of a single individual goes for nothing, so, by parity of reasoning, may that of all the rest of the community: but if the choice of every man in the community is held sacred, then what must be the weight and value of the whole.

Many persons object that by this means property is not represented, and so, to avoid that, they would have nothing but property represented, at the same time that they pretend that if the elective franchise were thrown open to the poor, they would be wholly at the command of the rich, to the prejudice and exclusion of the middle and independent classes of

society. Property always has a natural influence and authority: it is only people without property that have no natural protection, and require every artificial and legal one. *Those that have much, shall have more; and those that have little, shall have less.* This proverb is no less true in public than in private life. The *better orders* (as they are called, and who, in virtue of this title, would assume a monopoly in the direction of state affairs) are merely and in plain English those who are *better off* than others; and as they get the wished-for monopoly into their hands, others will uniformly be *worse off*, and will sink lower and lower in the scale; so that it is essentially requisite to extend the elective franchise in order to counteract the excess of the great and increasing goodness of the better orders to themselves. I see no reason to suppose that in any case popular feeling (if free course were given to it) would bear down public opinion. Literature is at present pretty nearly on the footing of universal suffrage, yet the public defer sufficiently to the critics; and when no party bias interferes, and the government do not make a point of running a writer down, the verdict is tolerably fair and just. I do not say that the result might not be equally satisfactory, when literature was patronised more immediately by the great; but then lords and ladies had no interest in praising a bad piece and condemning a good one. If they could have laid a tax on the town for not going to it, they would have run a bad play forty nights together, or the whole year round, without scruple. As things stand, the worse the law, the better for the lawmakers: it takes everything from others to give *to them.* It is common to insist on universal suffrage and the ballot together. But if the first were allowed, the second would be unnecessary. The ballot is only useful as a screen from arbitrary power. There is nothing manly or independent to recommend it.

Corollary 3. If I was out at sea in a boat with a *jure divino* monarch, and he wanted to throw me overboard, I would not let him. No gentleman would

ask such a thing, no freeman would submit to it. Has he, then, a right to dispose of the lives and liberties of thirty millions of men? Or have they more right than I have to resist his demands? They have thirty millions of times that right, if they had a particle of the same spirit that I have. It is not the individual, then, whom in this case I fear (to me 'there's *no* divinity doth hedge a king'), but thirty millions of his subjects that call me to account in his name, and who are of a most approved and indisputable loyalty, and who have both the right and power. The power rests with the multitude, but let them beware how the exercise of it turns against their own rights! It is not the idol but the worshippers that are to be dreaded, and who, by degrading one of their fellows, render themselves liable to be branded with the same indignities.

Corollary 4. No one can be born a slave; for my limbs are my own, and the power and the will to use them are anterior to all laws, and independent of the control of every other person. No one acquires a right over another but that other acquires some reciprocal right over him; therefore the relation of master and slave is a contradiction in political logic. Hence, also, it follows that combinations among labourers for the rise of wages are always just and lawful, as much as those among master manufacturers to keep them down. A man's labour is his own, at least as much as another's goods; and he may starve if he pleases, but he may refuse to work except on his own terms. The right of property is reducible to this simple principle, that one man has not a right to the produce of another's labour, but each man has a right to the benefit of his own exertions and the use of his natural and inalienable powers, unless for a supposed equivalent and by mutual consent. Personal liberty and property therefore rest upon the same foundation. I am glad to see that Mr. Macculloch, in his *Essay on Wages*, admits the right of combination among journeymen and others. I laboured this point

hard, and, I think, satisfactorily, a good while ago, in my *Reply to Mr. Malthus*. 'Throw your bread upon the waters, and after many days you shall find it again.'

There are four things that a man may especially call his own. 1. His person. 2. His actions. 3. His property. 4. His opinions. Let us see how each of these claims unavoidably circumscribes and modifies those of others, on the principle of abstract equity and necessity and independence above laid down.

First, as to the Rights of Persons. My intention is to show that the right of society to make laws to coerce the will of others, is founded on the necessity of repelling the wanton encroachment of that will on their rights; that is, strictly on the right of self-defence or resistance to aggression. Society comes forward and says, 'Let us alone, and we will let you alone, otherwise we must see which is strongest'; its object is not to patronise or advise individuals for their good, and against their will, but to protect itself: meddling with others forcibly on any other plea or for any other purpose is impertinence. But equal rights destroy one another; nor can there be a right to impossible or impracticable things. Let A, B, C, D, etc., be different component parts of any society, each claiming to be the centre and master of a certain sphere of activity and self-determination: as long as each keeps within his own line of demarcation there is no harm done, nor any penalty incurred —it is only the superfluous and overbearing will of particular persons that must be restrained or lopped off by the axe of the law. Let A be the culprit: B, C, D, etc., or the rest of the community, are plaintiffs against A, and wish to prevent his taking any unfair or unwarranted advantage over them. They set up no pretence to dictate or domineer over him, but merely to hinder his dictating to and domineering over them; and in this, having both might and right on their side, they have no difficulty in putting it in execution. Every man's independence and discretionary power over what peculiarly and exclusively

concerns himself, is his *castle* (whether round, square, or, according to Mr. Owen's new map of improvements, in the form of a parallelogram). As long as he keeps within this, he is safe—society has no hold of him: it is when he quits it to attack his neighbours that they resort to reprisals, and make short work of the interloper. It is, however, time to endeavour to point out in what this natural division of right, and separate advantage consists. In the first place, A, B, C, D have the common and natural rights of persons, in so far that none of these has a right to offer violence to, or cause bodily pain or injury to any of the others. Sophists laugh at natural rights: they might as well deny that we have natural persons; for while the last distinction holds true and good by the constitution of things, certain consequences must and will follow from it—'while this machine is to us Hamlet,' etc. For instance, I should like to know whether Mr. Burke, with his *Sublime and Beautiful* fancies, would deny that each person has a particular body and senses belonging to him, so that he feels a peculiar and natural interest in whatever affects these more than another can, and whether such a peculiar and paramount interest does not imply a direct and unavoidable right in maintaining this circle of individuality inviolate. To argue otherwise is to assert that indifference, or that which does not feel either the good or the ill, is as capable a judge and zealous a discriminator of right and wrong as that which does. The right, then, is coeval and co-extended with the interest, not a product of convention, but inseparable from the order of the universe; the doctrine itself is natural and solid; it is the contrary fallacy that is made of air and words. Mr. Burke, in such a question, was like a man out at sea in a haze, and could never tell the difference between land and clouds. If another break my arm by violence, this will not certainly give him additional health or strength; if he stun me by a blow or inflict torture on my limbs, it is I who feel the pain, and not he; and it is hard if

I, who am the sufferer, am not allowed to be the judge. That another should pretend to deprive me of it, or pretend to judge for me, and set up his will against mine, in what concerns this portion of my existence—where I have all at stake and he nothing—is not merely injustice, but impudence. The circle of personal security and right, then, is not an imaginary and arbitrary line fixed by law and the will of the prince, or the scaly finger of Mr. Hobbes's *Leviathan*, but is real and inherent in the nature of things, and itself the foundation of law and justice. 'Hands off is fair play'—according to the old adage. One, therefore, has not a right to lay violent hands on another, or to infringe on the sphere of his personal identity; one must not run foul of another, or he is liable to be repelled and punished for the offence. If you meet an Englishman suddenly in the street, he will run up against you sooner than get out of your way, which last he thinks a compromise of his dignity and a relinquishment of his purpose, though he expects you to get out of his A Frenchman in the same circumstances will come up close to you, and try to walk over you, as if there was no one in his way; but if you take no notice of him, he will step on one side, and make you a low bow. The one is a fellow of stubborn will, the other a *petit-maître*. An Englishman at a play mounts upon a bench, and refuses to get down at the request of another, who threatens to call him to account the next day. 'Yes,' is the answer of the first, 'if your master will let you!' His abuse of liberty, he thinks, is justified by the other's want of it. All an Englishman's ideas are modifications of his will; which shows, in one way, that right is founded on will, since the English are at once the freest and most wilful of all people. If you meet another on the ridge of a precipice, are you to throw each other down? Certainly not. You are to pass as well as you can. 'Give and take,' is the rule of natural right, where the right is not all on one side and cannot be claimed entire. Equal weights

and scales produce a balance, as much as where the scales are empty: so it does not follow (as our votaries of absolute power would insinuate) that one man's right is nothing because another's is something. But suppose there is not time to pass, and one or other must perish, in the case just mentioned, then each must do the best for himself that he can, and the instinct of self-preservation prevails over everything else. In the streets of London, the passengers take the right hand of one another and the wall alternately; he who should not conform to this rule would be guilty of a breach of the peace. But if a house were falling, or a mad ox driven furiously by, the rule would be, of course, suspended, because the case would be out of the ordinary. Yet I think I can conceive, and have even known, persons capable of carrying the point of gallantry in political right to such a pitch as to refuse to take a precedence which did not belong to them in the most perilous circumstances, just as a soldier may waive a right to quit his post, and takes his turn in battle. The actual collision or case of personal assault and battery, is, then, clearly prohibited, inasmuch as each person's body is clearly defined: but how if A use other means of annoyance against B, such as a sword or poison, or resort to what causes other painful sensations besides tangible ones, for instance, certain disagreeable sounds and smells? Or, if these are included as a violation of personal rights, then how draw the line between them and the employing certain offensive words and gestures or uttering opinions which I disapprove? This is a puzzler for the dogmatic school; but they solve the whole difficulty by an assumption of *utility*, which is as much as to tell a person that the way to any place to which he asks a direction is 'to follow his nose.' We want to know by given marks and rules what is best and useful; and they assure us very wisely, that this is infallibly and clearly determined by what *is* best and useful. Let us try something else. It seems no less necessary to erect certain little *fortalices*, with

palisades and outworks about them, for RIGHT to establish and maintain itself in, than as landmarks to guide us across the wide waste of UTILITY. If a person runs a sword through me, or administers poison, or procures it to be administered, the effect, the pain, disease or death is the same, and I have the same right to prevent it, on the principle that I am the sufferer; that the injury is offered to me, and he is no gainer by it, except for mere malice or caprice, and I therefore remain master and judge of my own remedy, as in the former case; the principle and definition of right being to secure to each individual the determination and protection of that portion of sensation in which he has the greatest, if not a sole interest, and, as it were, identity with it. Again, as to what are called *nuisances*, to wit offensive smells, sounds, etc., it is more difficult to determine, on the ground that *one man's meat is another man's poison*. I remember a case occurred in the neighbourhood where I was, and at the time I was trying my best at this question, which puzzled me a good deal. A rector of a little town in Shropshire, who was at variance with all his parishioners, had conceived a particular spite to a lawyer who lived next door to him, and as a means of annoying him, used to get together all sorts of rubbish, weeds, and unsavoury materials, and set them on fire, so that the smoke should blow over into his neighbour's garden; whenever the wind set in that direction, he said, as a signal to his gardener, 'It's a fine Wicksteed wind to-day'; and the operation commenced. Was this an action of assault and battery, or not? I think it was, for this reason, that the offence was unequivocal, and that the only motive for the proceeding was the giving this offence. The assailant would not like to be served so himself. Mr. Bentham would say, the malice of the motive was a set-off to the injury. I shall leave that *prima philosophia* consideration out of the question. A man who knocks out another's brains with a bludgeon may say it pleases him to do so; but will it

please him to have the compliment returned? If he still persists, in spite of this punishment, there is no preventing him; but if not, then it is a proof that he thinks the pleasure less than the pain to himself, and consequently to another in the scales of justice. The *lex talionis* is an excellent test. Suppose a third person (the physician of the place) had said, 'It is a fine Egerton wind to-day,' our rector would have been non-plussed; for he would have found that, as he suffered all the hardship, he had the right to complain of and to resist an action of another, the consequences of which affected principally himself. Now mark: if he had himself had any advantage to derive from the action, which he could not obtain in any other way, then he would feel that his neighbour also had the same plea and right to follow his own course (still this might be a doubtful point); but in the other case it would be sheer malice and wanton interference; that is, not the exercise of a right, but the invasion of another's comfort and independence. Has a person, then, a right to play on the horn or on a flute, on the same staircase? I say, yes; because it is for his own improvement and pleasure, and not to annoy another; and because, accordingly, every one in his own case would wish to reserve this or a similar privilege to himself. I do not think a person has a right to beat a drum under one's window, because this is altogether disagreeable, and if there is an extraordinary motive for it, then it is fit that the person should be put to some little inconvenience in removing his sphere of liberty of action to a reasonable distance. A tallow-chandler's shop or a steam-engine is a nuisance in a town, and ought to be removed into the suburbs; but they are to be tolerated where they are least inconvenient, because they are necessary somewhere, and there is no remedying the inconvenience. The right to protest against and to prohibit them rests with the suffering party; but because this point of the greatest interest is less clear in some cases than in others, it does not follow that

there is no right or principle of justice in the case. 3. As to matters of contempt and the expression of opinion, I think these do not fall under the head of force, and are not, on that ground, subjects of coercion and law. For example, if a person inflicts a sensation upon me by material means, whether tangible or otherwise, I cannot help that sensation; I am so far the slave of that other, and have no means of resisting him but by force, which I would define to be material agency. But if another proposes an opinion to me, I am not bound to be of this opinion; my judgment and will is left free, and therefore I have no right to resort to force to recover a liberty which I have not lost. If I do this to prevent that other from pressing that opinion, it is I who invade his liberty, without warrant, because without necessity. It may be urged that material agency, or force, is used in the adoption of sounds or letters of the alphabet, which I cannot help seeing or hearing. But the injury is not here, but in the moral and artificial inference, which I am at liberty to admit or reject, according to the evidence. There is no force but argument in the case, and it is reason, not the will of another, that gives the law. Further, the opinion expressed, generally concerns not one individual, but the general interest; and of that my approbation or disapprobation is not a commensurate or the sole judge. I am judge of my own interests, because it is my affair, and no one's else; but by the same rule, I am not judge, nor have I a *veto* on that which appeals to all the world, merely because I have a prejudice or fancy against it. But suppose another expresses by signs or words a contempt for me? *Answer.* I do not know that he is bound to have a respect for me. Opinion is free; for if I wish him to have that respect, then he must be left free to judge for himself, and consequently to arrive at and to express the contrary opinion, or otherwise the verdict and testimony I aim at could not be obtained; just as players must consent to be hissed if they expect

to be applauded. Opinion cannot be forced, for it is not grounded on force, but on evidence and reason, and therefore these last are the proper instruments to control that opinion, and to make it favourable to what we wish, or hostile to what we disapprove. In what relates to action, the will of another is force, or the determining power: in what relates to opinion, the mere will or *ipse dixit* of another is of no avail but as it gains over other opinions to its side, and therefore neither needs nor admits of force as a counteracting means to be used against it. But in the case of calumny or indecency: 1. I would say that it is the suppression of truth that gives falsehood its worst edge. What transpires (however maliciously or secretly) in spite of the law, is taken for gospel, and as it is impossible to prevent calumny, so it is impossible to counteract it on the present system, or while every attempt to answer it is attributed to the people's not daring to speak the truth. If any single fact or accident peeps out, the whole character, having this legal screen before it, is supposed to be of a piece; and the world, defrauded of the means of coming to their own conclusion, naturally infer the worst. Hence the saying, that reputation once gone never returns. If, however, we grant the general licence or liberty of the press, in a scheme where publicity is the great object, it seems a manifest *contre-sens* that the author should be the only thing screened or kept a secret: either, therefore, an anonymous libeller would be heard with contempt, or if he signed his name thus —, or thus — —, it would be equivalent to being branded publicly as a calumniator, or marked with the T. F. (*travail forcé*) or the broad R. (rogue) on his back. These are thought sufficient punishments, and yet they rest on opinion without stripes or labour. As to indecency, in proportion as it is flagrant is the shock and resentment against it; and as vanity is the source of indecency, so the universal discountenance and shame is its most effectual antidote. If it is public, it produces immediate reprisals from public opinion

which no brow can stand; and if secret, it had better be left so. No one can then say it is obtruded on him; and if he will go in search of it, it seems odd he should call upon the law to frustrate the object of his pursuit. Further, at the worst, society has its remedy in its own hands whenever its moral sense is outraged, that is, it may send to Coventry, or excommunicate like the church of old; for though it may have no right to prosecute, it is not bound to protect or patronise, unless by voluntary consent of all parties concerned. Secondly, as to rights of action, or personal liberty. These have no limit but the rights of persons or property aforesaid, or to be hereafter named. They are the channels in which the others run without injury and without impediment, as a river within its banks. Every one has a right to use his natural powers in the way most agreeable to himself, and which he deems most conducive to his own advantage, provided he does not interfere with the corresponding rights and liberties of others. He has no right to coerce them by a decision of his individual will, and as long as he abstains from this he has no right to be coerced by an expression of the aggregate will, that is, by law. The law is the emanation of the aggregate will, and this will receives its warrant to act only from the forcible pressure from without, and its indispensable resistance to it. Let us see how this will operate to the pruning and curtailment of law. The rage of legislation is the first vice of society; it ends by limiting it to as few things as possible. 1. There can, according to the principle here imperfectly sketched, be no laws for the enforcement of morals; because morals have to do with the will and affections, and the law only puts a restraint on these. Every one is politically constituted the judge of what is best for himself; it is only when he encroaches on others that he can be called to account. He has no right to say to others, You shall do as I do: how then should they have a right to say to him, You shall do as we do?

Mere numbers do not convey the right, for the law addresses not one, but the whole community. For example, there cannot rightly be a law to set a man in the stocks for getting drunk. It injures his health, you say. That is his concern, and not mine. But it is detrimental to his affairs: if so, he suffers most by it. But it is ruinous to his wife and family: he is their natural and legal guardian. But they are thrown upon the parish: the parish need not take the burden upon itself, unless it chooses or has agreed to do so. If a man is not kind to or fond of his wife I see no law to make him. If he beats her, or threatens her life, she as clearly has a right to call in the aid of a constable or justice of peace. I do not see, in like manner, how there can be law against gambling (against cheating there may), nor against usury. A man gives twenty, forty, a hundred per cent. with his eyes open, but would he do it if strong necessity did not impel him? Certainly no man would give double if he could get the same advantage for half. There are circumstances in which a rope to save me from drowning, or a draught of water, would be worth all I have. In like manner, lotteries are fair things; for the loss is inconsiderable, and the advantage may be incalculable. I do not believe the poor put into them, but the reduced rich, the *shabby-genteel*. Players were formerly prohibited as a nuisance, and fortune-tellers still are liable to the Vagrant Act, which the parson of the parish duly enforces, in his zeal to prevent cheating and imposture, while he himself has his two livings, and carries off a tenth of the produce of the soil. Rape is an offence clearly punishable by law; but I would not say that simple incontinence is so. I will give one more example, which, though quaint, may explain the distinction I aim at. A man may commit suicide if he pleases, without being responsible to any one. He may quit the world as he would quit the country where he was born. But if any person were to fling himself from the gallery into the pit of a playhouse, so as to endanger the lives of others, if

he did not succeed in killing himself, he would render himself liable to punishment for the attempt, if it were to be supposed that a person so desperately situated would care about consequences. Duelling is lawful on the same principle, where every precaution is taken to show that the act is voluntary and fair on both sides. I might give other instances, but these will suffice. 2. There should be a perfect toleration in matters of religion. In what relates to the salvation of a man's soul, he is infinitely more concerned than I can be; and to pretend to dictate to him in this particular is an infinite piece of impertinence and presumption. But if a man has no religion at all? That does not hinder me from having any. If he stood at the church door and would not let me enter, I should have a right to push him aside; but if he lets me pass by without interruption, I have no right to turn back and drag him in after me. He might as well force me to have no religion as I force him to have one, or burn me at a stake for believing what he does not. Opinion, 'like the wild goose, flies unclaimed of any man': heaven is like 'the marble air, accessible to all'; and therefore there is no occasion to trip up one another's heels on the road, or to erect a turnpike gate to collect large sums from the passengers. How have I a right to make another pay for the saving of my soul, or to assist me in damning his? There should be no secular interference in sacred things; no laws to suppress or establish any church or sect in religion, no religious persecutions, tests, or disqualifications; the different sects should be left to inveigh and hate each other as much as they please; but without the love of exclusive domination and spiritual power there would be little temptation to bigotry and intolerance.

3. As to the Rights of Property. It is of no use a man's being left to enjoy security, or to exercise his freedom of action, unless he has a right to appropriate certain other things necessary to his comfort and subsistence to his own use. In a state of nature, or rather of solitary independence, he has a right to all

he can lay his hands on : what then limits this right? Its being inconsistent with the same right in others. This strikes a mathematical or logical balance between two extreme and equal pretensions. As there is not a natural and indissoluble connection between the individual and his property, or those outward objects of which he may have need (they being detached, unlimited, and transferable), as there is between the individual and his person, either as an organ of sensation or action, it is necessary, in order to prevent endless debate and quarrels, to fix upon some other criterion or common ground of preference. Animals, or savages, have no idea of any other right than that of the strongest, and seize on all they can get by force, without any regard to justice or an equal claim. 1. One mode of settling the point is to divide the spoil. That is allowing an equal advantage to both. Thus boys, when they unexpectedly find anything, are accustomed to cry '*Halves!*' But this is liable to other difficulties, and applies only to the case of joint finding. 2. Priority of possession is a fair way of deciding the right of property; first, on the mere principle of a lottery, or the old saying, '*First come, first served*'; secondly, because the expectation having been excited, and the will more set upon it, this constitutes a powerful reason for not violently forcing it to let go its hold. The greater strength of volition is, we have seen, one foundation of right; for supposing a person to be absolutely indifferent to anything, he could properly set up no claim to it. 3. Labour, or the having produced a thing or fitted it for use by previous exertion, gives this right, chiefly, indeed, for moral and final causes; because if one enjoyed what another had produced, there would be nothing but idleness and rapacity; but also in the sense we are inquiring into, because on a merely selfish ground the labour undergone, or the time lost, is entitled to an equivalent *cæteris manentibus*. 4. If another, voluntarily, or for a consideration, resigns to me his right in anything,

it to all intents and purposes becomes mine. This accounts not only for gifts, the transfer of property by bargains, etc., but for legacies, and the transmission of property in families or otherwise. It is hard to make a law to circumscribe this right of disposing of what we have as we please; yet the boasted law of primogeniture, which is professedly the bulwark and guardian of property, is in direct violation of this principle. 5, and lastly. Where a thing is common, and there is enough for all, and no one contributes to it, as air or water, there can be no property in it. The proximity to a herring-fishery, or the having been the first to establish a particular traffic in such commodities, may perhaps give this right by aggravating our will, as having a nearer or longer power over them; but the rule is the other way. It is on the same principle that poaching is a kind of honest thieving, for that which costs no trouble and is confined to no limits seems to belong to no one exclusively (why else do poachers or country people seize on this kind of property with the least reluctance, but that it is the least like stealing?); and as the game laws and the tenaciousness of the rights to that which has least the character of property, as most a point of honour, produced a revolution in one country, so they are not unlikely to produce it in another. The object and principle of the laws of property, then, is this: 1. To supply individuals and the community with what they need. 2. To secure an equal share to each individual, other circumstances being the same. 3. To keep the peace and promote industry and plenty, by proportioning each man's share to his own exertions, or to the good-will and discretion of others. The intention, then, being that no individual should rob another, or be starved but by his refusing to work (the earth and its produce being the natural estate of the community, subject to these regulations of individual right and public welfare), the question is, whether any individual can have a right to rob or starve the

whole community: or if the necessary discretion left in the application of the principle has led to a state of things subversive of the principle itself, and destructive to the welfare and existence of the state, whether the end being defeated, the law does not fall to the ground, or require either a powerful corrective or a total reconstruction. The end is superior to the means, and the use of a thing does not justify its abuse. If a clock is quite out of order and always goes wrong, it is no argument to say it was set right at first and on true mechanical principles, and therefore it must go on as it has done, according to all the rules of art; on the contrary, it is taken to pieces, repaired, and the whole restored to the original state, or, if this is impossible, a new one is made. So society, when out of order, which it is whenever the interests of the many are regularly and outrageously sacrificed to those of the few, must be repaired, and either a reform or a revolution cleanse its corruptions and renew its elasticity. People talk of the poor laws as a grievance. Either they or a national bankruptcy, or a revolution, are necessary. The labouring population have not doubled in the last forty years; there are still no more than are necessary to do the work in husbandry, etc., that is indispensably required; but the wages of a labouring man are no higher than they were forty years ago, and the price of food and necessaries is at least double what it was then, owing to taxes, grants, monopolies, and immense fortunes gathered during the war by the richer or more prosperous classes, who have not ceased to propagate in the geometrical ratio, though the poor have not done it, and the maintaining of whose younger and increasing branches in becoming splendour and affluence presses with double weight on the poor and labouring classes. The greater part of a community ought not to be paupers or starving; and when a government by obstinacy and madness has reduced them to that state, it must either take wise and effectual measures

to relieve them from it, or pay the forfeit of its own wickedness and folly.

It seems, then, that a system of just and useful laws may be constructed nearly, if not wholly, on the principle of the right of self-defence, or the security for person, liberty, and property. There are exceptions, such, for instance, as in the case of children, idiots, and insane persons. These common-sense dictates for a general principle can only hold good where the general conditions are complied with. There are also mixed cases, partaking of civil and moral justice. Is a man bound to support his children? Not in strict political right; but he may be compelled to forego all the benefits of civil society, if he does not fulfil an engagement which, according to the feelings and principles of that society, he has undertaken. So in respect to marriage. It is a voluntary contract, and the violation of it is punishable on the same plea of sympathy and custom. Government is not necessarily founded on common consent, but on the right which society has to defend itself against all aggression. But am I bound to pay or support the government for defending the society against any violence or injustice? No: but then they may withdraw the protection of the law from me if I refuse, and it is on this ground that the contributions of each individual to the maintenance of the state are demanded. Laws are, or ought to be, founded on the supposed infraction of individual rights. If these rights, and the best means of maintaining them, are always clear, and there could be no injustice or abuse of power on the part of the government, every government might be its own lawgiver: but as neither of these is the case, it is necessary to recur to the general voice for settling the boundaries of right and wrong, and even more for preventing the government, under pretence of the general peace and safety, from subjecting the whole liberties, rights, and resources of the community to its own advantage and sole will.

1828.

ESSAY XII

ON THE CHARACTER OF BURKE

THERE is no single speech of Mr. Burke which can convey a satisfactory idea of his powers of mind: to do him justice, it would be necessary to quote all his works; the only specimen of Burke is, *all that he wrote*. With respect to most other speakers, a specimen is generally enough, or more than enough. When you are acquainted with their manner, and see what proficiency they have made in the mechanical exercise of their profession, with what facility they can borrow a simile, or round a period, how dexterously they can argue, and object, and rejoin, you are satisfied; there is no other difference in their speeches than what arises from the difference of the subjects. But this was not the case with Burke. He brought his subjects along with him; he drew his materials from himself. The only limits which circumscribed his variety were the stores of his own mind. His stock of ideas did not consist of a few meagre facts, meagrely stated, of half-a-dozen commonplaces tortured into a thousand different ways; but his mine of wealth was a profound understanding, inexhaustible as the human heart, and various as the sources of human nature. He therefore enriched every subject to which he applied himself, and new subjects were only the occasions of calling forth fresh powers of mind which had not been before exerted. It would therefore be in vain to look for the proof of his powers in any one of his speeches or writings: they all contain some additional proof of power. In speaking of Burke, then, I shall speak of the whole

compass and circuit of his mind—not of that small part or section of him which I have been able to give: to do otherwise would be like the story of the man who put the brick in his pocket, thinking to show it as the model of a house. I have been able to manage pretty well with respect to all my other speakers, and curtailed them down without remorse. It was easy to reduce them within certain limits, to fix their spirit, and condense their variety; by having a certain quantity given, you might infer all the rest; it was only the same thing over again. But who can bind Proteus, or confine the roving flight of genius?

Burke's writings are better than his speeches, and indeed his speeches are writings. But he seemed to feel himself more at ease, to have a fuller possession of his faculties in addressing the public, than in addressing the House of Commons. Burke was *raised* into public life; and he seems to have been prouder of this new dignity than became so great a man. For this reason, most of his speeches have a sort of parliamentary preamble to them: he seems fond of coquetting with the House of Commons, and is perpetually calling the Speaker out to dance a minuet with him before he begins. There is also something like an attempt to stimulute the superficial dulness of his hearers by exciting their surprise, by running into extravagance: and he sometimes demeans himself by condescending to what may be considered as bordering too much upon buffoonery, for the amusement of the company. Those lines of Milton were admirably applied to him by some one—'The elephant to make them sport wreathed his proboscis lithe.' The truth is, that he was out of his place in the House of Commons; he was eminently qualified to shine as a man of genius, as the instructor of mankind, as the brightest luminary of his age; but he had nothing in common with that motley crew of knights, citizens, and burgesses. He could not be said to be 'native and endued unto that element.' He was above it; and never appeared like himself, but

when, forgetful of the idle clamours of party, and of the little views of little men, he applied to his country and the enlightened judgment of mankind.

I am not going to make an idle panegyric on Burke (he has no need of it); but I cannot help looking upon him as the chief boast and ornament of the English House of Commons. What has been said of him is, I think, strictly true, that 'he was the most eloquent man of his time: his wisdom was greater than his eloquence.' The only public man that in my opinion can be put in any competition with him, is Lord Chatham; and he moved in a sphere so very remote, that it is almost impossible to compare them. But though it would perhaps be difficult to determine which of them excelled most in his particular way, there is nothing in the world more easy than to point out in what their peculiar excellences consisted. They were in every respect the reverse of each other. Chatham's eloquence was popular: his wisdom was altogether plain and practical. Burke's eloquence was that of the poet; of the man of high and unbounded fancy: his wisdom was profound and contemplative. Chatham's eloquence was calculated to make men *act*: Burke's was calculated to make them *think*. Chatham could have roused the fury of a multitude, and wielded their physical energy as he pleased: Burke's eloquence carried conviction into the mind of the retired and lonely student, opened the recesses of the human breast, and lighted up the face of nature around him. Chatham supplied his hearers with motives to immediate action: Burke furnished them with *reasons* for action which might have little effect upon them at the time, but for which they would be the wiser and better all their lives after. In research, in originality, in variety of knowledge, in richness of invention, in depth and comprehension of mind, Burke had as much the advantage of Lord Chatham as he was excelled by him in plain common sense, in strong feeling, in steadiness of purpose, in vehemence, in warmth, in enthusiasm, and

energy of mind. Burke was the man of genius, of fine sense, and subtle reasoning; Chatham was a man of clear understanding, of strong sense, and violent passions. Burke's mind was satisfied with speculation: Chatham's was essentially *active*; it could not rest without an object. The power which governed Burke's mind was his Imagination; that which gave its *impetus* to Chatham was Will. The one was almost the creature of pure intellect, the other of physical temperament.

There are two very different ends which a man of genius may propose to himself, either in writing or speaking, and which will accordingly give birth to very different styles. He can have but one of these two objects; either to enrich or strengthen the mind; either to furnish us with new ideas, to lead the mind into new trains of thought, to which it was before unused, and which it was incapable of striking out for itself; or else to collect and embody what we already knew, to rivet our old impressions more deeply; to make what was before plain still plainer, and to give to that which was familiar all the effect of novelty. In the one case we receive an accession to the stock of our ideas; in the other, an additional degree of life and energy is infused into them: our thoughts continue to flow in the same channels, but their pulse is quickened and invigorated. I do not know how to distinguish these different styles better than by calling them severally the inventive and refined, or the impressive and vigorous styles. It is only the subject-matter of eloquence, however, which is allowed to be remote or obscure. The things themselves may be subtle and recondite, but they must be dragged out of their obscurity and brought struggling to the light; they must be rendered plain and palpable (as far as it is in the wit of man to do so), or they are no longer eloquence. That which by its natural impenetrability, and in spite of every effort, remains dark and difficult, which is impervious to every ray, on which the imagination can shed no lustre, which can

be clothed with no beauty, is not a subject for the orator or poet. At the same time it cannot be expected that abstract truths or profound observations should ever be placed in the same strong and dazzling points of view as natural objects and mere matters of fact. It is enough if they receive a reflex and borrowed lustre, like that which cheers the first dawn of morning, where the effect of surprise and novelty gilds every object, and the joy of beholding another world gradually emerging out of the gloom of night, 'a new creation rescued from his reign,' fills the mind with a sober rapture. Philosophical eloquence is in writing what *chiaro-scuro* is in painting; he would be a fool who should object that the colours in the shaded part of a picture were not so bright as those on the opposite side; the eye of the connoisseur receives an equal delight from both, balancing the want of brilliancy and effect with the greater delicacy of the tints, and difficulty of the execution. In judging of Burke, therefore, we are to consider, first, the style of eloquence which he adopted, and, secondly, the effects which he produced with it. If he did not produce the same effects on vulgar minds as some others have done, it was not for want of power, but from the turn and direction of his mind.[1] It was because his subjects, his ideas, his arguments, were less vulgar. The question is not whether he brought certain truths equally home to us, but how much nearer he brought them than they were before. In my opinion, he united the two extremes of refinement and strength in a higher degree than any other writer whatever.

The subtlety of his mind was undoubtedly that which rendered Burke a less popular writer and speaker than he otherwise would have been. It weakened the impression of his observations upon others, but I cannot admit that it weakened the

[1] For instance, he produced less effect on the mob that compose the English House of Commons, than Chatham or Fox, or even Pitt.

observations themselves ; that it took anything from their real weight or solidity. Coarse minds think all that is subtle, futile : that because it is not gross and obvious and palpable to the senses, it is therefore light and frivolous, and of no importance in the real affairs of life ; thus making their own confined understandings the measure of truth, and supposing that whatever they do not distinctly perceive, is nothing. Seneca, who was not one of the vulgar, also says, that subtle truths are those which have the least substance in them, and consequently approach nearest to nonentity. But for my own part I cannot help thinking that the most important truths must be the most refined and subtle ; for that very reason, that they must comprehend a great number of particulars, and instead of referring to any distinct or positive fact, must point out the combined effects of an extensive chain of causes, operating gradually, remotely, and collectively, and therefore imperceptibly. General principles are not the less true or important because from their nature they elude immediate observation ; they are like the air, which is not the less necessary because we neither see nor feel it, or like that secret influence which binds the world together, and holds the planets in their orbits. The very same persons who are the most forward to laugh at all systematic reasoning as idle and impertinent, you will the next moment hear exclaiming bitterly against the baleful effects of new-fangled systems of philosophy, or gravely descanting on the immense importance of instilling sound principles of morality into the mind. It would not be a bold conjecture, but an obvious truism, to say, that all the great changes which have been brought about in the mortal world, either for the better or worse, have been introduced, not by the bare statement of facts, which are things already known, and which must always operate nearly in the same manner, but by the development of certain opinions and abstract principles of reasoning on life and manners, or the origin of society and

man's nature in general, which being obscure and uncertain, vary from time to time, and produce corresponding changes in the human mind. They are the wholesome dew and rain, or the mildew and pestilence that silently destroy. To this principle of generalisation all wise lawgivers, and the systems of philosophers, owe their influence.

It has always been with me a test of the sense and candour of any one belonging to the opposite party, whether he allowed Burke to be a great man. Of all the persons of this description that I have ever known, I never met with above one or two who would make this concession; whether it was that party feelings ran too high to admit of any real candour, or whether it was owing to an essential vulgarity in their habits of thinking, they all seemed to be of opinion that he was a wild enthusiast, or a hollow sophist, who was to be answered by bits of facts, by smart logic, by shrewd questions, and idle songs. They looked upon him as a man of disordered intellects, because he reasoned in a style to which they had not been used, and which confounded their dim perceptions. If you said that though you differed with him in sentiment, yet you thought him an admirable reasoner, and a close observer of human nature, you were answered with a loud laugh, and some hackneyed quotation. 'Alas! Leviathan was not so tamed!' They did not know whom they had to contend with. The corner-stone, which the builders rejected, became the head-corner, though to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; for, indeed, I cannot discover that he was much better understood by those of his own party, if we may judge from the little affinity there is between his mode of reasoning and theirs. The simple clue to all his reasonings on politics is, I think, as follows. He did not agree with some writers that that mode of government is necessarily the best which is the cheapest. He saw in the construction of society other principles at work, and other capacities of fulfilling the desires, and perfecting the nature of

man, besides those of securing the equal enjoyment of the means of animal life, and doing this at as little expense as possible. He thought that the wants and happiness of men were not to be provided for, as we provide for those of a herd of cattle, merely by attending to their physical necessities. He thought more nobly of his fellows. He knew that man had affections and passions and powers of imagination, as well as hunger and thirst, and the sense of heat and cold. He took his idea of political society from the pattern of private life, wishing, as he himself expresses it, to incorporate the domestic charities with the orders of the state, and to blend them together. He strove to establish an analogy between the compact that binds together the community at large, and that which binds together the several families that compose it. He knew that the rules that form the basis of private morality are not founded in reason, that is, in the abstract properties of those things which are the subjects of them, but in the nature of man, and his capacity of being affected by certain things from habit, from imagination, and sentiment, as well as from reason.

Thus, the reason why a man ought to be attached to his wife and children is not, surely, that they are better than others (for in this case every one else ought to be of the same opinion), but because he must be chiefly interested in those things which are nearest to him, and with which he is best acquainted, since his understanding cannot reach equally to everything; because he must be most attached to those objects which he has known the longest, and which by their situation have actually affected him the most, not those which in themselves are the most affecting whether they have ever made any impression on him or no; that is, because he is by his nature the creature of habit and feeling, and because it is reasonable that he should act in conformity to his nature. Burke was so far right in saying that it is on objection to an institution that it is founded in *prejudice*, but the contrary, if that prejudice is natural

and right; that is, if it arises from those circumstances which are properly subjects of feeling and association, not from any defect or perversion of the understanding in those things which fall strictly under its jurisdiction. On this profound maxim he took his stand. Thus he contended, that the prejudice in favour of nobility was natural and proper, and fit to be encouraged by the positive institutions of society: not on account of the real or personal merit of the individuals, but because such an institution has a tendency to enlarge and raise the mind, to keep alive the memory of past greatness, to connect the different ages of the world together, to carry back the imagination over a long tract of time, and feed it with the contemplation of remote events: because it is natural to think highly of that which inspires us with high thoughts, which has been connected for many generations with splendour, and affluence, and dignity, and power, and privilege. He also conceived, that by transferring the respect from the person to the thing, and thus rendering it steady and permanent, the mind would be habitually formed to sentiments of deference, attachment, and fealty, to whatever else demanded its respect: that it would be led to fix its view on what was elevated and lofty, and be weaned from that low and narrow jealousy which never willingly or heartily admits of any superiority in others, and is glad of every opportunity to bring down all excellence to a level with its own miserable standard. Nobility did not, therefore, exist to the prejudice of the other orders of the state, but by, and for them. The inequality of the different orders of society did not destroy the unity and harmony of the whole. The health and well-being of the moral world was to be promoted by the same means as the beauty of the natural world; by contrast, by change, by light and shade, by variety of parts, by order and proportion. To think of reducing all mankind to the same insipid level, seemed to him the same absurdity as to destroy the inequalities of surface in a country, for the benefit of agriculture and com-

merce. In short, he believed that the interests of men in society should be consulted, and their several stations and employments assigned, with a view to their nature, not as physical, but as moral beings, so as to nourish their hopes, to lift their imagination, to enliven their fancy, to rouse their activity, to strengthen their virtue, and to furnish the greatest number of objects of pursuit and means of enjoyment to beings constituted as man is, consistently with the order and stability of the whole.

The same reasoning might be extended farther. I do not say that his arguments are conclusive: but they are profound and *true*, as far as they go. There may be disadvantages and abuses necessarily interwoven with his scheme, or opposite advantages of infinitely greater value, to be derived from another order of things and state of society. This, however, does not invalidate either the truth or importance of Burke's reasoning; since the advantages he points out as connected with the mixed form of government are really and necessarily inherent in it: since they are compatible, in the same degree, with no other; since the principle itself on which he rests his argument (whatever we may think of the application) is of the utmost weight and moment; and since, on whichever side the truth lies, it is impossible to make a fair decision without having the opposite side of the question clearly and fully stated to us. This Burke has done in a masterly manner. He presents to you one view or face of society. Let him who thinks he can, give the reverse side with equal force, beauty, and clearness. It is said, I know, that truth is *one*; but to this I cannot subscribe, for it appears to me that truth is *many*. There are as many truths as there are things and causes of action and contradictory principles at work in society. In making up the account of good and evil, indeed, the final result must be one way or the other; but the particulars on which that result depends are infinite and various.

It will be seen from what I have said, that I am

very far from agreeing with those who think that Burke was a man without understanding, and a merely florid writer. There are two causes which have given rise to this calumny; namely, that narrowness of mind which leads men to suppose that the truth lies entirely on the side of their own opinions, and that whatever does not make for them is absurd and irrational; secondly, a trick we have of confounding reason with judgment, and supposing that it is merely the province of the understanding to pronounce sentence, and not to give evidence, or argue the case; in short, that it is a passive, not an active faculty. Thus there are persons who never run into any extravagance, because they are so buttressed up with the opinions of others on all sides, that they cannot lean much to one side or the other; they are so little moved with any kind of reasoning, that they remain at an equal distance from every extreme, and are never very far from the truth, because the slowness of their faculties will not suffer them to make much progress in error. These are persons of great judgment. The scales of the mind are pretty sure to remain even, when there is nothing in them. In this sense of the word, Burke must be allowed to have wanted judgment, by all those who think that he was wrong in his conclusions. The accusation of want of judgment, in fact, only means that you yourself are of a different opinion. But if in arriving at one error he discovered a hundred truths, I should consider myself a hundred times more indebted to him than if, stumbling on that which I consider as the right side of the question, he had committed a hundred absurdities in striving to establish his point. I speak of him now merely as an author, or as far as I and other readers are concerned with him; at the same time, I should not differ from any one who may be disposed to contend that the consequences of his writings as instruments of political power have been tremendous, fatal, such as no exertion of wit or knowledge or genius can ever counteract or atone for.

Burke also gave a hold to his antagonists by mixing up sentiment and imagery with his reasoning; so that being unused to such a sight in the region of politics, they were deceived, and could not discern the fruit from the flowers. Gravity is the cloak of wisdom; and those who have nothing else think it an insult to affect the one without the other, because it destroys the only foundation on which their pretensions are built. The easiest part of reason is dulness; the generality of the world are therefore concerned in discouraging any example of unnecessary brilliancy that might tend to show that the two things do not always go together. Burke in some measure dissolved the spell. It was discovered, that his gold was not the less valuable for being wrought into elegant shapes, and richly embossed with curious figures; that the solidity of a building is not destroyed by adding to it beauty and ornament; and that the strength of a man's understanding is not always to be estimated in exact proportion to his want of imagination. His understanding was not the less real, because it was not the only faculty he possessed. He justified the description of the poet—

> 'How charming is divine philosophy!
> Not harsh and crabbed as dull fools suppose,
> But musical as is Apollo's lute!'

Those who object to this union of grace and beauty with reason, are in fact weak-sighted people, who cannot distinguish the noble and majestic form of Truth from that of her sister Folly, if they are dressed both alike! But there is always a difference even in the adventitious ornaments they wear, which is sufficient to distinguish them.

Burke was so far from being a gaudy or flowery writer, that he was one of the severest writers we have. His words are the most like things; his style is the most strictly suited to the subject. He unites every extreme and every variety of composition; the lowest and the meanest words and descriptions with

the highest. He exults in the display of power, in showing the extent, the force, and intensity of his ideas; he is led on by the mere impulse and vehemence of his fancy, not by the affectation of dazzling his readers by gaudy conceits or pompous images. He was completely carried away by his subject. He had no other object but to produce the strongest impression on his reader, by giving the truest, the most characteristic, the fullest, and most forcible description of things, trusting to the power of his own mind to mould them into grace and beauty. He did not produce a splendid effect by setting fire to the light vapours that float in the regions of fancy, as the chemists make fine colours with phosphorus, but by the eagerness of his blows struck fire from the flint, and melted the hardest substances in the furnace of his imagination. The wheels of his imagination did not catch fire from the rottenness of the materials, but from the rapidity of their motion. One would suppose, to hear people talk of Burke, that his style was such as would have suited the *Lady's Magazine*; soft, smooth, showy, tender, insipid, full of fine words, without any meaning. The essence of the gaudy or glittering style consists in producing a momentary effect by fine words and images brought together, without order or connection. Burke most frequently produced an effect by the remoteness and novelty of his combinations, by the force of contrast, by the striking manner in which the most opposite and unpromising materials were harmoniously blended together; not by laying his hands on all the fine things he could think of, but by bringing together those things which he knew would blaze out into glorious light by their collision. The florid style is a mixture of affectation and commonplace. Burke's was an union of untameable vigour and originality.

Burke was not a verbose writer. If he sometimes multiplies words, it is not for want of ideas, but because there are no words that fully express his

ideas, and he tries to do it as well as he can by different ones. He had nothing of the *set* or formal style, the measured cadence, and stately phraseology of Johnson, and most of our modern writers. This style, which is what we understand by the *artificial*, is all in one key. It selects a certain set of words to represent all ideas whatever, as the most dignified and elegant, and excludes all others as low and vulgar. The words are not fitted to the things, but the things to the words. Everything is seen through a false medium. It is putting a mask on the face of nature, which may indeed hide some specks and blemishes, but takes away all beauty, delicacy, and variety. It destroys all dignity or elevation, because nothing can be raised where all is on a level, and completely destroys all force, expression, truth, and character, by arbitrarily confounding the differences of things, and reducing everything to the same insipid standard. To suppose that this stiff uniformity can add anything to real grace or dignity, is like supposing that the human body, in order to be perfectly graceful, should never deviate from its upright posture. Another mischief of this method is, that it confounds all ranks in literature. Where there is no room for variety, no discrimination, no nicety to be shown in matching the idea with its proper word, there can be no room for taste or elegance. A man must easily learn the art of writing, when every sentence is to be cast in the same mould: where he is only allowed the use of one word he cannot choose wrong, nor will he be in much danger of making himself ridiculous by affectation or false glitter, when, whatever subject he treats of, he must treat of it in the same way. This indeed is to wear golden chains for the sake of ornament.

Burke was altogether free from the pedantry which I have here endeavoured to expose. His style was as original, as expressive, as rich and varied, as it was possible; his combinations were as exquisite, as play-

ful, as happy, as unexpected, as bold and daring, as his fancy. If anything, he ran into the opposite extreme of too great an inequality, if truth and nature could ever be carried to an extreme.

Those who are best acquainted with the writings and speeches of Burke will not think the praise I have here bestowed on them exaggerated. Some proof will be found of this in the following extracts. But the full proof must be sought in his works at large, and particularly in the *Thoughts on the Discontents*; in his *Reflections on the French Revolution*; in his *Letter to the Duke of Bedford*; and in the *Regicide Peace*. The two last of these are perhaps the most remarkable of all his writings, from the contrast they afford to each other. The one is the most delightful exhibition of wild and brilliant fancy that is to be found in English prose, but it is too much like a beautiful picture painted upon gauze; it wants something to support it: the other is without ornament, but it has all the solidity, the weight, the gravity of a judicial record. It seems to have been written with a certain constraint upon himself, and to show those who said he could not *reason*, that his arguments might be stripped of their ornaments without losing anything of their force. It is certainly, of all his works, that in which he has shown most power of logical deduction, and the only one in which he has made any important use of facts. In general he certainly paid little attention to them: they were the playthings of his mind. He saw them as he pleased, not as they were; with the eye of the philosopher or the poet, regarding them only in their general principle, or as they might serve to decorate his subject. This is the natural consequence of much imagination: things that are probable are elevated into the rank of realities. To those who can reason on the essences of things, or who can invent according to nature, the experimental proof is of little value. This was the case with Burke. In the present instance, however, he seems to have forced his mind

into the service of facts; and he succeeded completely. His comparison between our connection with France or Algiers, and his account of the conduct of the war, are as clear, as convincing, as forcible examples of this kind of reasoning, as are anywhere to be met with. Indeed I do not think there is anything in Fox (whose mind was purely historical), or in Chatham (who attended to feelings more than facts), that will bear a comparison with them.

Burke has been compared to Cicero—I do not know for what reason. Their excellences are as different, and indeed as opposite, as they can well be. Burke had not the polished elegance, the glossy neatness, the artful regularity, the exquisite modulation of Cicero: he had a thousand times more richness and originality of mind, more strength and pomp of diction.

It has been well observed, that the ancients had no word that properly expresses what we mean by the word *genius*. They perhaps had not the thing. Their minds appear to have been too exact, too retentive, too minute and subtle, too sensible to the external differences of things, too passive under their impressions, to admit of those bold and rapid combinations, those lofty flights of fancy, which, glancing from heaven to earth, unite the most opposite extremes, and draw the happiest illustrations from things the most remote. Their ideas were kept too confined and distinct by the material form or vehicle in which they were conveyed, to unite cordially together, to be melted down in the imagination. Their metaphors are taken from things of the same class, not from things of different classes; the general analogy, not the individual feeling, directs them in their choice. Hence, as Dr. Johnson observed, their similes are either repetitions of the same idea, or so obvious and general as not to lend any additional force to it; as when a huntress is compared to Diana, or a warrior rushing into battle to a lion rushing on his prey. Their *forte* was exquisite art and perfect imitation. Witness their statues and other things of

the same kind. But they had not that high and enthusiastic fancy which some of our own writers have shown. For the proof of this, let any one compare Milton and Shakspeare with Homer and Sophocles, or Burke with Cicero.

It may be asked whether Burke was a poet. He was so only in the general vividness of his fancy, and in richness of invention. There may be poetical passages in his works, but I certainly think that his writings in general are quite distinct from poetry; and that for the reason before given, namely, that the subject-matter of them is not poetical. The finest part of them are illustrations or personifications of dry abstract ideas;[1] and the union between the idea and the illustration is not of that perfect and pleasing kind as to constitute poetry, or indeed to be admissible, but for the effect intended to be produced by it; that is, by every means in our power to give animation and attraction to subjects in themselves barren of ornament, but which at the same time are pregnant with the most important consequences, and in which the understanding and the passions are equally interested.

I have heard it remarked by a person, to whose opinion I would sooner submit than to a general council of critics, that the sound of Burke's prose is not musical; that it wants cadence; and that instead of being so lavish of his imagery as is generally supposed, he seemed to him to be rather parsimonious in the use of it, always expanding and making the most of his ideas. This may be true if we compare him with some of our poets, or perhaps with some of our early prose writers, but not if we compare him with any of our political writers or parliamentary speakers. There are some very fine things of Lord Bolingbroke's on the same subjects, but not equal to Burke's. As for Junius, he is at the head of his class; but that

[1] As in the comparison of the British Constitution to the 'proud keep of Windsor,' etc., the most splendid passage in his works.

class is not the highest. He has been said to have more dignity than Burke. Yes—if the stalk of a giant is less dignified than the strut of a *petit-maître*. I do not mean to speak disrespectfully of Junius, but grandeur is not the character of his composition; and if it is not to be found in Burke it is to be found nowhere.

1807.

ESSAY XIII

ON THE CHARACTER OF FOX

I SHALL begin with observing generally, that Mr. Fox excelled all his contemporaries in the extent of his knowledge, in the clearness and distinctness of his views, in quickness of apprehension, in plain practical common sense, in the full, strong, and absolute possession of his subject. A measure was no sooner proposed than he seemed to have an instantaneous and intuitive perception of its various bearings and consequences; of the manner in which it would operate on the different classes of society, on commerce or agriculture, on our domestic or foreign policy; of the difficulties attending its execution; in a word, of all its practical results, and the comparative advantages to be gained either by adopting or rejecting it. He was intimately acquainted with the interests of the different parts of the community, with the minute and complicated details of political economy, with our external relations, with the views, the resources, and the maxims of other states. He was master of all those facts and circumstances which it was necessary to know in order to judge fairly and determine wisely; and he knew them not loosely or lightly, but in number, weight, and measure. He had also stored his memory by reading and general study, and improved his understanding by the lamp of history. He was well acquainted with the opinions and sentiments of the best authors, with the maxims of the most profound politicians, with the causes of the rise and fall of states, with the general passions of men, with the characters of different nations, and

the laws and constitution of his own country. He was a man of large, capacious, powerful, and highly cultivated intellect. No man could know more than he knew; no man's knowledge could be more sound, more plain and useful; no man's knowledge could lie in more connected and tangible masses; no man could be more perfectly master of his ideas, could reason upon them more closely, or decide upon them more impartially. His mind was full, even to overflowing. He was so habitually conversant with the most intricate and comprehensive trains of thought, or such was the natural vigour and exuberance of his mind, that he seemed to recall them without any effort. His ideas quarrelled for utterance. So far from ever being at a loss for them, he was obliged rather to repress and rein them in, lest they should overwhelm and confound, instead of informing the understandings of his hearers.

If to this we add the ardour and natural impetuosity of his mind, his quick sensibility, his eagerness in the defence of truth, and his impatience of everything that looked like trick or artifice or affectation, we shall be able in some measure to account for the character of his eloquence. His thoughts came crowding in too fast for the slow and mechanical process of speech. What he saw in an instant, he could only express imperfectly, word by word, and sentence after sentence. He would, if he could, 'have bared his swelling heart,' and laid open at once the rich treasures of knowledge with which his bosom was fraught. It is no wonder that this difference between the rapidity of his feelings, and the formal round-about method of communicating them, should produce some disorder in his frame; that the throng of his ideas should try to overleap the narrow boundaries which confined them, and tumultuously break down their prison-doors, instead of waiting to be let out one by one, and following patiently at due intervals and with mock dignity, like poor dependents, in the train of words; that he should express himself in

hurried sentences, in involuntary exclamations, by vehement gestures, by sudden starts and bursts of passion. Everything showed the agitation of his mind. His tongue faltered, his voice became almost suffocated, and his face was bathed in tears. He was lost in the magnitude of his subject. He reeled and staggered under the load of feeling which oppressed him. He rolled like the sea beaten by a tempest. Whoever, having the feelings of a man, compared him at these times with his boasted rival—his stiff, straight, upright figure, his gradual contortions, turning round as if moved by a pivot, his solemn pauses, his deep tones, 'whose sound reverbed their own hollowness,' must have said, This is a man; that is an automaton. If Fox had needed grace, he would have had it; but it was not the character of his mind, nor would it have suited with the style of his eloquence. It was Pitt's object to smooth over the abruptness and intricacies of his argument by the gracefulness of his manner, and to fix the attention of his hearers on the pomp and sound of his words. Lord Chatham, again, strove to *command* others; he did not try to convince them, but to overpower their understandings by the greater strength and vehemence of his own; to awe them by a sense of personal superiority: and he therefore was obliged to assume a lofty and dignified manner. It was to him they bowed, not to truth; and whatever related to *himself*, must therefore have a tendency to inspire respect and admiration. Indeed, he would never have attempted to gain that ascendant over men's minds that he did, if either his mind or body had been different from what they were; if his temper had not urged him to control and command others, or if his personal advantages had not enabled him to secure that kind of authority which he coveted. But it would have been ridiculous in Fox to have affected either the smooth plausibility, the stately gravity of the one, or the proud domineering, imposing dignity of the other; or even if he could have succeeded, it would

only have injured the effect of his speeches.[1] What he had to rely on was the strength, the solidity of his ideas, his complete and thorough knowledge of his subject. It was his business therefore to fix the attention of his hearers, not on himself, but on his subject, to rivet it there, to hurry it on from words to things:—the only circumstance of which they required to be convinced with respect to himself, was the sincerity of his opinions; and this would be best done by the earnestness of his manner, by giving a loose to his feelings, and by showing the most perfect forgetfulness of himself, and of what others thought of him. The moment a man shows you either by affected words or looks or gestures, that he is thinking of himself, and you, that he is trying either to please or terrify you into compliance, there is an end at once to that kind of eloquence which owes its effect to the force of truth, and to your confidence in the sincerity of the speaker. It was, however, to the confidence inspired by the earnestness and simplicity of his manner, that Mr. Fox was indebted for more than half the effect of his speeches. Some others might possess nearly as much information, as exact a knowledge of the situation and interests of the country; but they wanted that zeal, that animation, that enthusiasm, that deep sense of the importance of the subject, which removes all doubt or suspicion from the minds of the hearers, and communicates its own warmth to every breast. We may convince by argument alone; but it is by the interest we discover in the success of our reasonings, that we persuade others to feel and act with us. There are two circum-

[1] There is an admirable, judicious, and truly useful remark in the preface to Spenser (not by Dr. Johnson, for he left Spenser out of his poets, but by *one* Upton), that the question was not whether a better poem might not have been written on a different plan, but whether Spenser would have written a better one on a different plan. I wish to apply this to Fox's *ungainly* manner. I do not mean to say, that his manner was the best possible (for that would be to say that he was the greatest man conceivable), but that it was the best for him.

stances which Fox's speeches and Lord Chatham's had in common: they are alike distinguished by a kind of plain downright common sense, and by the vehemence of their manner. But still there is a great difference between them, in both these respects. Fox in his opinions was governed by facts—Chatham was more influenced by the feelings of others respecting those facts. Fox endeavoured to find out what the consequences of any measure would be; Chatham attended more to what people would think of it. Fox appealed to the practical reason of mankind; Chatham to popular prejudice. The one repelled the encroachments of power by supplying his hearers with arguments against it; the other by rousing their passions and arming their resentment against those who would rob them of their birthright. Their vehemence and impetuosity arose also from very different feelings. In Chatham it was pride, passion, self-will, impatience of control, a determination to have his own way, to carry everything before him; in Fox it was pure, good nature, a sincere love of truth, an ardent attachment to what he conceived to be right; an anxious concern for the welfare and liberties of mankind. Or if we suppose that ambition had taken a strong hold of both their minds, yet their ambition was of a very different kind: in the one it was the love of power, in the other it was the love of fame. Nothing can be more opposite than these two principles, both in their origin and tendency. The one originates in a selfish, haughty, domineering spirit; the other in a social and generous sensibility, desirous of the love and esteem of others, and anxiously bent upon gaining merited applause. The one grasps at immediate power by any means within its reach; the other, if it does not square its actions by the rules of virtue, at least refers them to a standard which comes the nearest to it—the disinterested applause of our country, and the enlightened judgment of posterity. The love of fame is consistent with the steadiest attachment to principle, and indeed strengthens and

supports it; whereas the love of power, where this is the ruling passion, requires the sacrifice of principle, at every turn, and is inconsistent even with the shadow of it. I do not mean to say that Fox had no love of power, or Chatham no love of fame (this would be reversing all we know of human nature), but that the one principle predominated in the one, and the other in the other. My reader will do me great injustice if he supposes that in attempting to describe the characters of different speakers by contrasting their general qualities, I mean anything beyond the *more* or *less*: but it is necessary to describe those qualities simply and in the abstract, in order to make the distinction intelligible. Chatham resented any attack made upon the cause of liberty, of which he was the avowed champion, as an indignity offered to himself. Fox felt it as a stain upon the honour of his country, and as an injury to the rights of his fellow-citizens. The one was swayed by his own passions and purposes, with very little regard to the consequences; the sensibility of the other was roused, and his passions kindled into a generous flame, by a real interest in whatever related to the welfare of mankind, and by an intense and earnest contemplation of the consequences of the measures he opposed. It was this union of the zeal of the patriot with the enlightened knowledge of the statesman, that gave to the eloquence of Fox its more than mortal energy; that warmed, expanded, penetrated every bosom. He relied on the force of truth and nature alone; the refinements of philosophy, the pomp and pageantry of the imagination were forgotten, or seemed light and frivolous; the fate of nations, the welfare of millions, hung suspended as he spoke; a torrent of manly eloquence poured from his heart, bore down everything in its course, and surprised into a momentary sense of human feeling the breathing corpses, the wire-moved puppets, the stuffed figures, the flexible machinery, the 'deaf and dumb things' of a court.

I find (I do not know how the reader feels) that it is difficult to write a character of Fox without running into insipidity or extravagance. And the reason of this is, there are no splendid contrasts, no striking irregularities, no curious distinctions to work upon; no 'jutting frieze, buttress, nor coigne of 'vantage,' for the imagination to take hold of. It was a plain marble slab, inscribed in plain legible characters, without either hieroglyphics or carving. There was the same directness and manly simplicity in everything that he did. The whole of his character may indeed be summed up in two words—strength and simplicity. Fox was in the class of common men, but he was the first in that class. Though it is easy to describe the differences of things, nothing is more difficult than to describe their degrees or quantities. In what I am going to say, I hope I shall not be suspected of a design to under-rate his powers of mind, when in fact I am only trying to ascertain their nature and direction. The degree and extent to which he possessed them can only be known by reading, or indeed by having heard his speeches.

His mind, as I have already said, was, I conceive, purely *historical*; and having said this, I have I believe said all. But perhaps it will be necessary to explain a little farther what I mean. I mean then, that his memory was in an extraordinary degree tenacious of facts; that they were crowded together in his mind without the least perplexity or confusion; that there was no chain of consequences too vast for his powers of comprehension; that the different parts and ramifications of his subject were never so involved and intricate but that they were easily disentangled in the clear prism of his understanding. The basis of his wisdom was experience: he not only knew what had happened, but by an exact knowledge of the real state of things, he could always tell what in the common course of events would happen in future. The force of his mind was exerted on facts: as long as he could lean directly upon these, as long

as he had the actual objects to refer to, to steady himself by, he could analyse, he could combine, he could compare and reason upon them, with the utmost exactness; but he could not reason *out of* them. He was what is understood by a *matter-of-fact* reasoner. He was better acquainted with the concrete masses of things, their substantial forms and practical connections, than with their abstract nature or general definitions. He was a man of extensive information, of sound knowledge, and clear understanding, rather than the acute observer or profound thinker. He was the man of business, the accomplished statesman, rather than the philosopher. His reasonings were, generally speaking, calculations of certain positive results, which, the *data* being given, must follow as matters of course, rather than unexpected and remote truths drawn from a deep insight into human nature, and the subtle application of general principles to particular cases. They consisted chiefly in the detail and combination of a vast number of items in an account, worked by the known rules of political arithmetic; not in the discovery of bold, comprehensive, and original theorems in the science. They were rather acts of memory, of continued attention, of a power of bringing all his ideas to bear at once upon a single point, than of reason or invention. He was the attentive observer who watches the various effects and successive movements of a machine already constructed, and can tell how to manage it while it goes on as it has always done; but who knows little or nothing of the principles on which it is constructed, nor how to set it right, if it becomes disordered, except by the most common and obvious expedients. Burke was to Fox what the geometrician is to the mechanic. Much has been said of the 'prophetic mind' of Mr. Fox. The same epithet has been applied to Mr. Burke, till it has become proverbial. It has, I think, been applied without much reason to either. Fox wanted the scientific part. Burke wanted the practical. Fox

had too little imagination, Burke had too much: that is, he was careless of facts, and was led away by his passions to look at one side of a question only. He had not that fine sensibility to outward impressions, that nice *tact* of circumstances, which is necessary to the consummate politician. Indeed, his wisdom was more that of the legislator than of the active statesman. They both tried their strength in the Ulysses' bow of politicians, the French Revolution: and they were both foiled. Fox indeed foretold the success of the French in combating with foreign powers. But this was no more than what every friend of the liberty of France foresaw or foretold as well as he. All those on the same side of the question were inspired with the same sagacity on the subject. Burke, on the other hand, seems to have been beforehand with the public in foreboding the internal disorders that would attend the Revolution, and its ultimate failure; but then it is at least a question whether he did not make good his own predictions: and certainly he saw into the causes and connection of events much more clearly after they had happened than before. He was however undoubtedly a profound commentator on that apocalyptical chapter in the history of human nature, which I do not think Fox was. Whether led to it by the events or not, he saw thoroughly into the principles that operated to produce them; and he pointed them out to others in a manner which could not be mistaken. I can conceive of Burke, as the genius of the storm, perched over Paris, the centre and focus of anarchy (so he would have us believe), hovering 'with mighty wings outspread over the abyss, and rendering it pregnant,' watching the passions of men gradually unfolding themselves in new situations, penetrating those hidden motives which hurried them from one extreme into another, arranging and analysing the principles that alternately pervaded the vast chaotic mass, and extracting the elements of order and the cement of social life from the decom-

position of all society; while Charles Fox in the meantime dogged the heels of the allies (all the while calling out to them to stop) with his sutler's bag, his muster roll, and army estimates at his back. He said, You have only fifty thousand troops, the enemy have a hundred thousand: this place is dismantled, it can make no resistance: your troops were beaten last year, they must therefore be disheartened this. This is excellent sense and sound reasoning, but I do not see what it has to do with philosophy. But why was it necessary that Fox should be a philosopher? Why, in the first place, Burke was a philosopher, and Fox, to keep up with him, must be so too. In the second place, it was necessary in order that his indiscreet admirers, who have no idea of greatness but as it consists in certain names and pompous titles, might be able to talk big about their patron. It is a bad compliment we pay to our idol when we endeavour to make him out something different from himself; it shows that we are not satisfied with what he is. I have heard it said that he had as much imagination as Burke. To this extravagant assertion I shall make what I conceive to be a very cautious and moderate answer: that Burke was as superior to Fox in this respect as Fox perhaps was to the first person you would meet in the street. There is, in fact, hardly an instance of imagination to be met with in any of his speeches; what there is, is of the rhetorical kind. I may, however, be wrong. He might excel as much in profound thought, and richness of fancy, as he did in other things; though I cannot perceive it. However, when any one publishes a book called The Beauties of Fox, containing the original reflections, brilliant passages, lofty metaphors, etc., to be found in his speeches, without the detail or connection, I shall be very ready to give the point up.

In logic Fox was inferior to Pitt—indeed, in all the formalities of eloquence, in which the latter excelled as much as he was deficient in the soul of

substance. When I say that Pitt was superior to Fox in logic, I mean that he excelled him in the formal division of the subject, in always keeping it in view, as far as he chose; in being able to detect any deviation from it in others; in the management of his general topics; in being aware of the mood and figure in which the argument must move, with all its nonessentials, dilemmas, and alternatives; in never committing himself, nor ever suffering his antagonist to occupy an inch of the plainest ground, but under cover of a syllogism. He had more of 'the dazzling fence of argument,' as it has been called. He was, in short, better at his weapon. But then, unfortunately, it was only a dagger of lath that the wind could turn aside; whereas Fox wore a good trusty blade, of solid metal, and real execution.

I shall not trouble myself to inquire whether Fox was a man of strict virtue and principle; or in other words, how far he was one of those who screw themselves up to a certain pitch of ideal perfection, who, as it were, set themselves in the stocks of morality, and make mouths at their own situation. He was not one of that tribe, and shall not be tried by their self-denying ordinances. But he was endowed with one of the most excellent natures that ever fell to the lot of any of God's creatures. It has been said, that 'an honest man's the noblest work of God.' There is indeed a purity, a rectitude, an integrity of heart, a freedom from every selfish bias, and sinister motive, a manly simplicity and noble disinterestedness of feeling, which is in my opinion to be preferred before every other gift of nature or art. There is a greatness of soul that is superior to all the brilliancy of the understanding. This strength of moral character, which is not only a more valuable but a rarer quality than strength of understanding (as we are oftener led astray by the narrowness of our feelings, than want of knowledge), Fox possessed in the highest degree. He was superior to every kind of jealousy, of suspicion, of malevolence; to every narrow and sordid

motive. He was perfectly above every species of duplicity, of low art and cunning. He judged of everything in the downright sincerity of his nature, without being able to impose upon himself by any hollow disguise, or to lend his support to anything unfair or dishonourable. He had an innate love of truth, of justice, of probity, of whatever was generous or liberal. Neither his education, nor his connections, nor his situation in life, nor the low intrigues and virulence of party, could ever alter the simplicity of his taste, nor the candid openness of his nature. There was an elastic force about his heart, a freshness of social feeling, a warm glowing humanity, which remained unimpaired to the last. He was by nature a gentleman. By this I mean that he felt a certain deference and respect for the person of every man; he had an unaffected frankness and benignity in his behaviour to others, the utmost liberality in judging of their conduct and motives. A refined humanity constitutes the character of a gentleman. He was the true friend of his country, as far as it is possible for a statesman to be so. But his love of his country did not consist in his hatred of the rest of mankind. I shall conclude this account by repeating what Burke said of him at a time when his testimony was of the most value. 'To his great and masterly understanding he joined the utmost possible degree of moderation: he was of the most artless, candid, open, and benevolent disposition; disinterested in the extreme; of a temper mild and placable, even to a fault; and without one drop of gall in his constitution.'

1807.

ESSAY XIV

ON THE CHARACTER OF MR. PITT

The character of Mr. Pitt was, perhaps, one of the most singular that ever existed. With few talents, and fewer virtues, he acquired and preserved in one of the most trying situations, and in spite of all opposition, the highest reputation for the possession of every moral excellence, and as having carried the attainments of eloquence and wisdom as far as human abilities could go. This he did (strange as it appears) by a negation (together with the common virtues) of the common vices of human nature, and by the complete negation of every other talent that might interfere with the only one which he possessed in a supreme degree, and which indeed may be made to include the appearance of all others—an artful use of words, and a certain dexterity of logical arrangement. In these alone his power consisted ; and the defect of all other qualities which usually constitute greatness, contributed to the more complete success of these. Having no strong feelings, no distinct perceptions, his mind having no link as it were, to connect it with the world of external nature, every subject presented to him nothing more than a *tabula rasa*, on which he was at liberty to lay whatever colouring of language he pleased ; having no general principles, no comprehensive views of things, no moral habits of thinking, no system of action, there was nothing to hinder him from pursuing any particular purpose, by any means that offered ; having never any plan, he could not be convicted of inconsistency, and his own pride and obstinacy were the only rules of his conduct. Having

no insight into human nature, no sympathy with the passions of men, or apprehension of their real designs, he seemed perfectly insensible to the consequences of things, and would believe nothing till it actually happened. The fog and haze in which he saw everything communicated itself to others; and the total indistinctness and uncertainty of his own ideas tended to confound the perceptions of his hearers more effectually than the most ingenious misrepresentation could have done. Indeed, in defending his conduct he never seemed to consider himself as at all responsible for the success of his measures, or to suppose that future events were in our own power; but that as the best-laid schemes might fail, and there was no providing against all possible contingencies, this was a sufficient excuse for our plunging at once into any dangerous or absurd enterprise, without the least regard to consequences. His reserved logic confined itself solely to the *possible* and the *impossible*; and he appeared to regard the *probable* and *improbable*, the only foundation of moral prudence or political wisdom, as beneath the notice of a profound statesman; as if the pride of the human intellect were concerned in never entrusting itself with subjects, where it may be compelled to acknowledge its weakness.[1] From his

[1] One instance may serve as an example for all the rest:—When Mr. Fox last summer (1805) predicted the failure of the new confederacy against France, from a consideration of the circumstances and relative situation of both parties, that is, from an exact knowledge of the actual state of things, Mr. Pitt contented himself with answering—and, as in the blindness of his infatuation, he seemed to think quite satisfactorily—'That he could not assent to the honourable gentleman's reasoning, for that it went to this, that we were never to attempt to mend the situation of our affairs, because in so doing we might possibly make them worse.' No; it was not on account of this abstract possibility in human affairs, or because we were not absolutely sure of succeeding (for that any child might know), but because it was in the highest degree probable, or *morally* certain, that the scheme would fail, and leave us in a worse situation than we were before, that Mr. Fox disapproved of the attempt. There is in this a

manner of reasoning, he seemed not to have believed that the truth of his statements depended on the reality of the facts, but that the things depended on the order in which he arranged them in words: you would not suppose him to be agitating a serious question which had real grounds to go upon, but to be declaiming upon an imaginary thesis, proposed as an exercise in the schools. He never set himself to examine the force of the objections that were brought against his measures, or attempted to establish these upon clear, solid grounds of his own; but constantly contented himself with first gravely stating the logical form, or dilemma, to which the question reduced itself, and then, after having declared his opinion, proceeded to amuse his hearers by a series of rhetorical commonplaces, connected together in grave, sonorous, and elaborately constructed periods, without ever showing their real application to the subject in dispute. Thus, if any member of the Opposition disapproved of any measure, and enforced his objections by pointing out the many evils with which it was fraught, or the difficulties attending its execution, his only answer was, 'That it was true there might be inconveniences attending the measure proposed, but we were to remember, that every expedient that could be devised might be said to be nothing more than a choice of difficulties, and that all that human prudence could do was to consider on

degree of weakness and imbecility, a defect of understanding bordering on idiotism, a fundamental ignorance of the first principles of human reason and prudence, that in a great minister is utterly astonishing, and almost incredible. Nothing could ever drive him out of his dull forms, and naked generalities; which, as they are susceptible neither of degree nor variation, are therefore equally applicable to every emergency that can happen: and in the most critical aspect of affairs, he saw nothing but the same flimsy web of remote possibilities and metaphysical uncertainty. In his mind the wholesome pulp of practical wisdom and salutary advice was immediately converted into the dry chaff and husks of a miserable logic.

which side the advantages lay; that for his part, he conceived that the present measure was attended with more advantages and fewer disadvantages than any other that could be adopted; that if we were diverted from our object by every appearance of difficulty, the wheels of government would be clogged by endless delays and imaginary grievances; that most of the objections made to the measure appeared to him to be trivial, others of them unfounded and improbable; or that if a scheme free from all these objections could be proposed, it might after all prove inefficient; while, in the meantime, a material object remained unprovided for, or the opportunity of action was lost.' This mode of reasoning is admirably described by Hobbes, in speaking of the writings of some of the Schoolmen, of whom he says, that 'They had learned the trick of imposing what they list upon their readers, and declining the force of true reason by verbal forks: that is, distinctions which signify nothing, but serve only to astonish the multitude of ignorant men.' That what I have here stated comprehends the whole force of his mind, which consisted solely in this evasive dexterity and perplexing formality, assisted by a copiousness of words and commonplace topics, will, I think, be evident in any one who carefully looks over his speeches, undazzled by the reputation or personal influence of the speaker. It will be in vain to look in them for any of the common proofs of human genius or wisdom. He has not left behind him a single memorable saying—not one profound maxim—one solid observation — one forcible description — one beautiful thought—one humorous picture—one affecting sentiment.[1] He has made no addition whatever to the stock of human knowledge. He did not possess any one of those faculties which contribute to the

[1] I do remember one passage which has some meaning in it. At the time of the Regency Bill, speaking of the proposal to take the king's servants from him, he says, 'What must that great personage feel when he waked from the trance of his faculties, and asked for his attendants, if he were told

instruction and delight of mankind—depth of understanding, imagination, sensibility, wit, vivacity, clear and solid judgment. But it may be asked, If these qualities are not to be found in him, where are we to look for them? And I may be required to point out instances of them. I shall answer, then, that he had none of the profound legislative wisdom, piercing sagacity, or rich, impetuous, high-wrought imagination of Burke; the manly eloquence, strong sense, exact knowledge, vehemence, and natural simplicity of Fox: the ease, brilliancy, and acuteness of Sheridan. It is not merely that he had not all these qualities in the degree that they were severally possessed by his rivals, but he had not any of them in any striking degree. His reasoning is a technical arrangement of unmeaning commonplaces; his eloquence merely rhetorical; his style monotonous and artificial. If he could pretend to any one excellence in an eminent degree, it was to taste in composition. There is certainly nothing low, nothing puerile, nothing farfetched or abrupt in his speeches; there is a kind of faultless regularity pervading them throughout; but in the confined, mechanical, passive mode of eloquence which he adopted, it seemed rather more difficult to commit errors than to avoid them. A man who is determined never to move out of the beaten road, cannot lose his way. However, habit, joined to the peculiar mechanical memory which he possessed, carried this correctness to a degree which, in an extemporaneous speaker, was almost miraculous; he perhaps hardly ever uttered a sentence that was not perfectly regular and connected. In this respect he not only had the advantage over his own contemporaries, but perhaps no one that ever lived equalled him in this singular faculty. But for this, he would

that his subjects had taken advantage of his momentary absence of mind, and stripped him of the symbols of his personal elevation.' There is some grandeur in this. His admirers should have it inscribed in letters of gold; for they will not find another instance of the same kind.

always have passed for a common man; and to this the constant sameness, and, if I may so say, vulgarity of his ideas, must have contributed not a little, as there was nothing to distract his mind from this one object of his unintermitted attention; and as even in his choice of words he never aimed at anything more than a certain general propriety, and stately uniformity of style. His talents were exactly fitted for the situation in which he was placed; where it was his business, not to overcome others, but to avoid being overcome. He was able to baffle opposition, not from strength or firmness, but from the evasive ambiguity and impalpable nature of his resistance, which gave no hold to the rude grasp of his opponents: no force could bind the loose phantom, and his mind (though 'not matchless, and his pride humbled by such rebuke'), soon rose from defeat unhurt,

> 'And in its liquid texture mortal wound
> Receiv'd no more than can the fluid air.'[1]

1806.

[1] I will only add, that it is the property of true genius to force the admiration even of enemies. No one was ever hated or envied for his powers of mind, if others were convinced of their real excellence. The jealousy and uneasiness produced in the mind by the display of superior talents almost always arises from a suspicion that there is some trick or deception in the case, and that we are imposed on by an appearance of what is not really there. True warmth and vigour communicate warmth and vigour; and we are no longer inclined to dispute the inspiration of the oracle, when we feel the '*presens Divus*' in our own bosoms. But when, without gaining any new light or heat, we only find our ideas thrown into perplexity and confusion by an art that we cannot comprehend, this is a kind of superiority which must always be painful, and can never be cordially admitted. For this reason the extraordinary talents of Mr. Pitt were always viewed, except by those of his own party, with a sort of jealousy, and *grudgingly* acknowledged; while those of his rivals were admitted by all parties in the most unreserved manner, and carried by acclamation.

ESSAY XV

ON THE CHARACTER OF LORD CHATHAM

Lord Chatham's genius burnt brightest at the last. The spark of liberty, which had lain concealed and dormant, buried under the dirt and rubbish of state intrigue and vulgar faction, now met with congenial matter, and kindled up 'a flame of sacred vehemence' in his breast. It burst forth with a fury and a splendour that might have awed the world, and made kings tremble. He spoke as a man should speak, because he felt as a man should feel, in such circumstances. He came forward as the advocate of liberty, as the defender of the rights of his fellow-citizens, as the enemy of tyranny, as the friend of his country, and of mankind. He did not stand up to make a vain display of his talents, but to discharge a duty, to maintain that cause which lay nearest to his heart, to preserve the ark of the British constitution from every sacrilegious touch, as the high-priest of his calling, with a pious zeal. The feelings and the rights of Englishmen were enshrined in his heart; and with their united force braced every nerve, possessed every faculty, and communicated warmth and vital energy to every part of his being. The whole man moved under this impulse. He felt the cause of liberty as his own. He resented every injury done to her as an injury to himself, and every attempt to defend it as an insult upon his understanding. He did not stay to dispute about words, about nice distinctions, about trifling forms. He laughed at the little attempts of little retailers of logic to entangle him in senseless argument. He did not come there as to a debating club, or law court, to start questions and hunt them down;

to wind and unwind the web of sophistry; to pick out the threads, and untie every knot with scrupulous exactness; to bandy logic with every pretender to a paradox; to examine, to sift evidence; to dissect a doubt and halve a scruple; to weigh folly and knavery in scales together, and see on which side the balance preponderated; to prove that liberty, truth, virtue, and justice were good things, or that slavery and corruption were bad things. He did not try to prove those truths which did not require any proof, but to make others feel them with the same force that he did; and to tear off the flimsy disguises with which the sycophants of power attempted to cover them. The business of an orator is not to convince, but persuade; not to inform, but to rouse the mind; to build upon the habitual prejudices of mankind (for reason of itself will do nothing), and to add feeling to prejudice, and action to feeling. There is nothing new or curious or profound in Lord Chatham's speeches. All is obvious and common; there is nothing but what we already knew, or might have found out for ourselves. We see nothing but the familiar everyday face of nature. We are always in broad daylight. But then there is the same difference between our own conceptions of things and his representation of them, as there is between the same objects seen on a dull cloudy day or in the blaze of sunshine. His common sense has the effect of inspiration. He electrifies his hearers, not by the novelty of his ideas, but by their force and intensity. He has the same ideas as other men, but he has them in a thousand times greater clearness and strength and vividness. Perhaps there is no man so poorly furnished with thoughts and feelings but that if he could recollect all that he knew, and had all his ideas at perfect command, he would be able to confound the puny arts of the most dexterous sophist that pretended to make a dupe of his understanding. But in the mind of Chatham, the great substantial truths of common sense, the leading maxims of the Constitution, the real interests and general feelings of mankind

were in a manner embodied. He comprehended the whole of his subject at a single glance—everything was firmly riveted to its place; there was no feebleness, no forgetfulness, no pause, no distraction; the ardour of his mind overcame every obstacle, and he crushed the objections of his adversaries as we crush an insect under our feet. His imagination was of the same character with his understanding, and was under the same guidance. Whenever he gave way to it, it 'flew an eagle flight, forth and right on'; but it did not become enamoured of its own emotion, wantoning in giddy circles, or 'sailing with supreme dominion through the azure deep of air.' It never forgot its errand, but went straight forward, like an arrow to its mark, with an unerring aim. It was his servant, not his master.

To be a great orator does not require the highest faculties of the human mind, but it requires the highest exertion of the common faculties of our nature. He has no occasion to dive into the depths of science, or to soar aloft on angels' wings. He keeps upon the surface, he stands firm upon the ground, but his form is majestic, and his eye sees far and near: he moves among his fellows, but he moves among them as a giant among common men. He has no need to read the heavens, to unfold the system of the universe, or create new worlds for the delighted fancy to dwell in; it is enough that he see things as they are; that he knows and feels and remembers the common circumstances and daily transactions that are passing in the world around him. He is not raised above others by being superior to the common interests, prejudices, and passions of mankind, but by feeling them in a more intense degree than they do. Force, then, is the sole characteristic excellence of an orator; it is almost the only one that can be of any service to him. Refinement, depth, elevation, delicacy, originality, ingenuity, invention, are not wanted; he must appeal to the sympathies of human nature, and whatever is not founded in these, is foreign to his purpose. He does not create, he can only imitate or echo back the

public sentiment. His object is to call up the feelings of the human breast; but he cannot call up what is not already there. The first duty of an orator is to be understood by every one; but it is evident that what all can understand, is not in itself difficult of comprehension. He cannot add anything to the materials afforded him by the knowledge and experience of others.

Lord Chatham, in his speeches, was neither philosopher nor poet. As to the latter, the difference between poetry and eloquence I take to be this: that the object of the one is to delight the imagination, that of the other to impel the will. The one ought to enrich and feed the mind itself with tenderness and beauty, the other furnishes it with motives of action. The one seeks to give immediate pleasure, to make the mind dwell with rapture on its own workings—it is to itself 'both end and use': the other endeavours to call up such images as will produce the strongest effect upon the mind, and makes use of the passions only as instruments to attain a particular purpose. The poet lulls and soothes the mind into a forgetfulness of itself, and 'laps it in Elysium': the orator strives to awaken it to a sense of its real interests, and to make it feel the necessity of taking the most effectual means for securing them. The one dwells in an ideal world; the other is only conversant with realities. Hence poetry must be more ornamented, must be richer and fuller and more delicate, because it is at liberty to select whatever images are naturally most beautiful, and likely to give most pleasure; whereas the orator is confined to particular facts, which he may adorn as well as he can, and make the most of, but which he cannot strain beyond a certain point without running into extravagance and affectation, and losing his end. However, from the very nature of the case, the orator is allowed a greater latitude, and is compelled to make use of harsher and more abrupt combinations in the decoration of his subject; for his art is an attempt to reconcile beauty and deformity together: on the contrary, the materials of poetry, which are

chosen at pleasure, are in themselves beautiful, and naturally combine with whatever else is beautiful. Grace and harmony are therefore essential to poetry, because they naturally arise out of the subject; but whatever adds to the effect, whatever tends to strengthen the idea or give energy to the mind, is of the nature of eloquence. The orator is only concerned to give a tone of masculine firmness to the will, to brace the sinews and muscles of the mind; not to delight our nervous sensibilities, or soften the mind into voluptuous indolence. The flowery and sentimental style is of all others the most intolerable in a speaker. — I shall only add on this subject, that modesty, impartiality, and candour, are not the virtues of a public speaker. He must be confident, inflexible, uncontrollable, overcoming all opposition by his ardour and impetuosity. We do not *command* others by sympathy with them, but by power, by passion, by will. Calm inquiry, sober truth, and speculative indifference will never carry any point. The passions are contagious; and we cannot contend against opposite passions with nothing but naked reason. Concessions to an enemy are clear loss; he will take advantage of them, but make us none in return. He will magnify the weak sides of our argument, but will be blind to whatever makes against himself. The multitude will always be inclined to side with that party whose passions are the most inflamed, and whose prejudices are the most inveterate. Passion should therefore never be sacrificed to punctilio. It should indeed be governed by prudence, but it should itself govern and lend its impulse and direction to abstract reason. Fox was a reasoner, Lord Chatham was an orator. Burke was both a reasoner and a poet; and was therefore still farther removed from that conformity with the vulgar notions and mechanical feelings of mankind, which will always be necessary to give a man the chief sway in a popular assembly.

1806.

ESSAY XVI

BELIEF, WHETHER VOLUNTARY?

'Thy wish was father, Harry, to that thought.'

It is an axiom in modern philosophy (among many other false ones) that belief is absolutely involuntary, since we draw our inferences from the premises laid before us, and cannot possibly receive any other impression of things than that which they naturally make upon us. This theory, that the understanding is purely passive in the reception of truth, and that our convictions are not in the power of our will, was probably first invented or insisted upon as a screen against religious persecution, and as an answer to those who imputed bad motives to all who differed from the established faith, and thought they could reform heresy and impiety by the application of fire and the sword. No doubt, that is not the way: for the will in that case irritates itself and grows refractory against the doctrines thus absurdly forced upon it; and as it has been said, the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. But though force and terror may not be always the surest way to make converts, it does not follow that there may not be other means of influencing our opinions, besides the naked and abstract evidence for any proposition: the sun melts the resolution which the storm could not shake. In such points as, whether an object is black or white or whether two and two make four,[1] we may not be able to believe as

[1] Hobbes is of opinion that men would deny this, if they had any interest in doing so.

we please or to deny the evidence of our reason and senses: but in those points on which mankind differ, or where we can be at all in suspense as to which side we shall take, the truth is not quite so plain or palpable; it admits of a variety of views and shades of colouring, and it should appear that we can dwell upon whichever of these we choose, and heighten or soften the circumstances adduced in proof, according as passion and inclination throw their casting-weight into the scale. Let any one, for instance, have been brought up in an opinion, let him have remained in it all his life, let him have attached all his notions of respectability, of the approbation of his fellow-citizens or his own self-esteem to it, let him then first hear it called in question, and a strong and unforeseen objection stated to it, will not this startle and shock him as if he had seen a spectre, and will he not struggle to resist the arguments that would unsettle his habitual convictions, as he would resist the divorcing of soul and body? Will he come to the consideration of the question impartially, indifferently, and without any wrong bias, or give the painful and revolting truth the same cordial welcome as the long-cherished and favourite prejudice? To say that the truth or falsehood of a proposition is the only circumstance that gains it admittance into the mind, independently of the pleasure or pain it affords us, is itself an assertion made in pure caprice or desperation. A person may have a profession or employment connected with a certain belief, it may be the means of livelihood to him, and the changing it may require considerable sacrifices, or may leave him almost without resource (to say nothing of mortified pride)—this will not mend the matter. The evidence against his former opinion may be so strong (or may appear so to him) that he may be obliged to give it up, but not without a pang and after having tried every artifice and strained every nerve to give the utmost weight to the arguments favouring his own side, and to make light of and throw those against him into the background. And

nine times in ten this bias of the will and tampering with the proofs will prevail. It is only with very vigorous or very candid minds that the understanding exercises its just and boasted prerogative, and induces its votaries to relinquish a profitable delusion and embrace the dowerless truth. Even then they have the sober and discreet part of the world, all the *bons pères de famille*, who look principally to the main chance, against them, and they are regarded as little better than lunatics or profligates to fling up a good salary and a provision for themselves and families for the sake of that foolish thing, a *Conscience!* With the herd, belief on all abstract and disputed topics is voluntary, that is, is determined by considerations of personal ease and convenience, in the teeth of logical analysis and demonstration, which are set aside as mere waste of words. In short, generally speaking, people stick to an opinion that they have long supported and that supports them. How else shall we account for the regular order and progression of society: for the maintenance of certain opinions in particular professions and classes of men, as we keep water in cisterns, till in fact they stagnate and corrupt: and that the world and every individual in it is not 'blown about with every wind of doctrine' and whisper of uncertainty? There is some more solid ballast required to keep things in their established order than the restless fluctuation of opinion and 'infinite agitation of wit.' We find that people in Protestant countries continue Protestants, and in Catholic countries Papists. This, it may be answered, is owing to the ignorance of the great mass of them; but is their faith less bigoted, because it is not founded on a regular investigation of the proofs, and is merely an obstinate determination to believe what they have been told and accustomed to believe? Or is it not the same with the doctors of the church and its most learned champions, who read the same texts, turn over the same authorities, and discuss the same knotty points through their whole lives, only to

arrive at opposite conclusions? How few are shaken in their opinions, or have the grace to confess it? Shall we then suppose them all impostors, and that they keep up the farce of a system, of which they do not believe a syllable? Far from it: there may be individual instances, but the generality are not only sincere but bigots. Those who are unbelievers and hypocrites scarcely know it themselves, or if a man is not quite a knave, what pains will he not take to make a fool of his reason, that his opinions may tally with his professions? Is there then a Papist and a Protestant understanding—one prepared to receive the doctrine of transubstantiation and the other to reject it? No such thing: but in either case the ground of reason is pre-occupied by passion, habit, example—*the scales are falsified*. Nothing can therefore be more inconsequential than to bring the authority of great names in favour of opinions long established and universally received. Cicero's being a Pagan was no proof in support of the Heathen mythology, but simply of his being born at Rome before the Christian era; though his lurking scepticism on the subject and sneers at the augurs told against it, for this was an acknowledgment drawn from him in spite of a prevailing prejudice. Sir Isaac Newton and Napier of Merchiston both wrote on the *Apocalypse*; but this is neither a ground for a speedy anticipation of the Millennium, nor does it invalidate the doctrine of the gravitation of the planets or the theory of logarithms. One party would borrow the sanction of these great names in support of their wildest and most mystical opinions; others would arraign them of folly and weakness for having attended to such subjects at all. Neither inference is just. It is a simple question of chronology, or of the time when these celebrated mathematicians lived, and of the studies and pursuits which were then chiefly in vogue. The wisest man is the slave of opinion, except on one or two points on which he strikes out a light for himself and holds a torch to

the rest of the world. But we are disposed to make it out that all opinions are the result of reason, because they profess to be so; and when they are *right*, that is, when they agree with ours, that there can be no alloy of human frailty or perversity in them; the very strength of our prejudice making it pass for pure reason, and leading us to attribute any deviation from it to bad faith or some unaccountable singularity or infatuation. *Alas, poor human nature!* Opinion is for the most part only a battle, in which we take part and defend the side we have adopted, in the one case or the other, with a view to share the honour of the spoil. Few will stand up for a losing cause, or have the fortitude to adhere to a proscribed opinion; and when they do, it is not always from superior strength of understanding or a disinterested love of truth, but from obstinacy and sullenness of temper. To affirm that we do not cultivate an acquaintance with truth as she presents herself to us in a more or less pleasing shape, or is shabbily attired or well-dressed, is as much as to say that we do not shut our eyes to the light when it dazzles us, or withdraw our hands from the fire when it scorches us.

> 'Masterless passion sways us to the mood
> Of what it likes or loathes.'

Are we not averse to believe bad news relating to ourselves—forward enough if it relates to others? If something is said reflecting on the character of an intimate friend or near relative, how unwilling we are to lend an ear to it, how we catch at every excuse or palliating circumstance, and hold out against the clearest proof, while we instantly believe any idle report against an enemy, magnify the commonest trifles into crimes, and torture the evidence against him to our heart's content! Do not we change our opinion of the same person, and make him out to be *black* or *white* according to the terms we happen to be on? If we have a favourite author, do we not exaggerate his beauties and pass over his defects, and

vice versâ? The human mind plays the interested advocate much oftener than the upright and inflexible judge, in the colouring and relief it gives to the facts brought before it. We believe things not more because they are true or probable, than because we desire, or (if the imagination once takes that turn) because we dread them. 'Fear has more devils than vast hell can hold.' The sanguine always hope, the gloomy always despond, from temperament and not from forethought. Do we not disguise the plainest facts from ourselves if they are disagreeable? Do we not flatter ourselves with impossibilities? What girl does not look in the glass to persuade herself she is handsome? What woman ever believes herself old, or does not hate to be called so: though she knows the exact year and day of her age, the more she tries to keep up the appearance of youth to herself and others? What lover would ever acknowledge a flaw in the character of his mistress, or would not construe her turning her back on him into a proof of attachment? The story of *January and May* is pat to our purpose; for the credulity of mankind as to what touches our inclinations has been proverbial in all ages: yet we are told that the mind is passive in making up these wilful accounts and is guided by nothing but the *pros* and *cons* of evidence. Even in action and where we may determine by proper precaution the event of things, instead of being compelled to shut our eyes to what we cannot help, we still are the dupes of the feeling of the moment, and prefer amusing ourselves with fair appearances to securing more solid benefits by a sacrifice of Imagination and stubborn Will to Truth. The blindness of passion to the most obvious and well-known consequences is deplorable. There seems to be a particular fatality in this respect. Because a thing is in our power *till* we have committed ourselves, we appear to dally, to trifle with, to make light of it, and to think it will still be in our power *after* we have committed ourselves. Strange perversion of the reasoning faculties, which is little short of

madness, and which yet is one of the constant and practical sophisms of human life! It is as if one should say—I am in no danger from a tremendous machine unless I touch such a spring and therefore I will approach it, I will play with the danger, I will laugh at it, and at last in pure sport and wantonness of heart, from my sense of previous security, I *will* touch it—and *there's an end.* While the thing remains in contemplation, we may be said to stand safe and smiling on the brink: as soon as we proceed to action we are drawn into the vortex of passion and hurried to our destruction. A person taken up with some one purpose or passion is intent only upon that: he drives out the thought of everything but its gratification: in the pursuit of that he is blind to consequences: his first object being attained, they all at once, and as if by magic, rush upon his mind. The engine recoils, he is caught in his own snare. A servant girl, for some pique, or for an angry word, determines to poison her mistress. She knows beforehand (just as well as she does afterwards) that it is at least a hundred chances to one she will be hanged if she succeeds, yet this has no more effect upon her than if she had never heard of any such matter. The only idea that occupies her mind and hardens it against every other, is that of the affront she has received, and the desire of revenge; she broods over it; she meditates the mode, she is haunted with her scheme night and day; it works like poison; it grows into a madness, and she can have no peace till it is accomplished and *off her mind*; but the moment this is the case, and her passion is assuaged, fear takes place of hatred, the slightest suspicion alarms her with the certainty of her fate, from which she before wilfully averted her thoughts; she runs wildly from the officers before they know anything of the matter; the gallows stares her in the face, and if none else accuses her, so full is she of her danger and her guilt, that she probably betrays herself. She at first would see no consequences to result from her crime but the getting rid of a present

uneasiness; she now sees the very worst. The whole seems to depend on the turn given to the imagination, on our immediate disposition to attend to this or that view of the subject, the evil or the good. As long as our intention is unknown to the world, before it breaks out into action, it seems to be deposited in our own bosoms, to be a mere feverish dream, and to be left with all its consequences under our imaginary control: but no sooner is it realised and known to others, than it appears to have escaped from our reach, we fancy the whole world are up in arms against us, and vengeance is ready to pursue and overtake us. So in the pursuit of pleasure, we see only that side of the question which we approve; the disagreeable consequences (which may take place) make no part of our intention or concern, or of the wayward exercise of our will: if they should happen we cannot help it; they form an ugly and unwished-for contrast to our favourite speculation: we turn our thoughts another way, repeating the adage *Quod sic mihi ostendis incredulus odi.* It is a good remark in *Vivian Grey* that a bankrupt walks in the streets the day before his name is in the Gazette with the same erect and confident brow as ever, and only feels the mortification of his situation after it becomes known to others. Such is the force of sympathy, and its power to take off the edge of internal conviction! As long as we can impose upon the world, we can impose upon ourselves, and trust to the flattering appearances, though we know them to be false. We put off the evil day as long as we can, make a jest of it as the certainty becomes more painful, and refuse to acknowledge the secret to ourselves till it can no longer be kept from all the world. In short, we believe just as little or as much as we please of those things in which our will can be supposed to interfere; and it is only by setting aside our own interests and inclinations on more general questions that we stand any chance of arriving at a fair and rational judgment. Those who have the largest hearts have the

soundest understandings; and he is the truest philosopher who can forget himself. This is the reason why philosophers are often said to be mad, for thinking only of the abstract truth and of none of its worldly adjuncts—it seems like an absence of mind, or as if the devil had got into them! If belief were not in some degree voluntary, or were grounded entirely on strict evidence and absolute proof, every one would be a martyr to his opinions, and we should have no power of evading or glossing over those matter-of-fact conclusions for which positive vouchers could be produced, however painful these conclusions might be to our own feelings, or offensive to the prejudices of others.

ESSAY XVII

A FAREWELL TO ESSAY-WRITING

'This life is best, if quiet life is best.'

Food, warmth, sleep, and a book; these are all I at present ask—the *ultima Thule* of my wandering desires. Do you not then wish for

> 'A friend in your retreat,
> Whom you may whisper, solitude is sweet?'

Expected, well enough:—gone, still better. Such attractions are strengthened by distance. Nor a mistress? 'Beautiful mask! I know thee!' When I can judge of the heart from the face, of the thoughts from the lips, I may again trust myself. Instead of these give me the robin red-breast, pecking the crumbs at the door, or warbling on the leafless spray, the same glancing form that has followed me wherever I have been, and 'done its spiriting gently'; or the rich notes of the thrush that startle the ear of winter, and seem to have drunk up the full draught of joy from the very sense of contrast. To these I adhere, and am faithful, for they are true to me; and, dear in themselves, are dearer for the sake of what is departed, leading me back (by the hand) to that dreaming world, in the innocence of which they sat and made sweet music, waking the promise of future years, and answered by the eager throbbings of my own breast. But now 'the credulous hope of mutual minds is o'er,' and I turn back from the world that has deceived me, to nature that lent it a false beauty, and that keeps up the illusion

of the past. As I quaff my libations of tea in a morning, I love to watch the clouds sailing from the west, and fancy that 'the spring comes slowly up this way.' In this hope, while 'fields are dank and ways are mire,' I follow the same direction to a neighbouring wood, where, having gained the dry, level greensward, I can see my way for a mile before me, closed in on each side by copse-wood, and ending in a point of light more or less brilliant, as the day is bright or cloudy. What a walk is this to me! I have no need of book or companion—the days, the hours, the thoughts of my youth are at my side, and blend with the air that fans my cheek. Here I can saunter for hours, bending my eye forward, stopping and turning to look back, thinking to strike off into some less trodden path, yet hesitating to quit the one I am in, afraid to snap the brittle threads of memory. I remark the shining trunks and slender branches of the birch trees, waving in the idle breeze; or a pheasant springs up on whirring wing; or I recall the spot where I once found a wood-pigeon at the foot of a tree, weltering in its gore, and think how many seasons have flown since 'it left its little life in air.' Dates, names, faces come back—to what purpose? Or why think of them now? Or rather why not think of them oftener? We walk through life, as through a narrow path, with a thin curtain drawn around it; behind are ranged rich portraits, airy harps are strung—yet we will not stretch forth our hands and lift aside the veil, to catch glimpses of the one, or sweep the chords of the other. As in a theatre, when the old-fashioned green curtain drew up, groups of figures, fantastic dresses, laughing faces, rich banquets, stately columns, gleaming vistas appeared beyond; so we have only at any time to 'peep through the blanket of the past,' to possess ourselves at once of all that has regaled our senses, that is stored up in our memory, that has struck our fancy, that has pierced our hearts:—yet to all this we are indifferent, insensible, and seem intent only

on the present vexation, the future disappointment. If there is a Titian hanging up in the room with me, I scarcely regard it: how then should I be expected to strain the mental eye so far, or to throw down, by the magic spells of the will, the stone walls that enclose it in the Louvre? There is one head there of which I have often thought, when looking at it, that nothing should ever disturb me again, and I would become the character it represents—such perfect calmness and self-possession reigns in it! Why do I not hang an image of this in some dusky corner of my brain, and turn an eye upon it ever and anon, as I have need of some such talisman to calm my troubled thoughts? The attempt is fruitless, if not natural; or, like that of the French, to hang garlands on the grave, and to conjure back the dead by miniature pictures of them while living! It is only some actual coincidence or local association that tends, without violence, to 'open all the cells where memory slept.' I can easily, by stooping over the long-sprent grass and clay cold clod, recall the tufts of primroses, or purple hyacinths, that formerly grew on the same spot, and cover the bushes with leaves and singing-birds, as they were eighteen summers ago; or prolonging my walk and hearing the sighing gale rustle through a tall, straight wood at the end of it, can fancy that I distinguish the cry of hounds, and the fatal group issuing from it, as in the tale of Theodore and Honoria. A moaning gust of wind aids the belief; I look once more to see whether the trees before me answer to the idea of the horror-stricken grove, and an air-built city towers over their grey tops.

> 'Of all the cities in Romanian lands,
> The chief and most renown'd Ravenna stands.'[1]

I return home resolved to read the entire poem through, and, after dinner, drawing my chair to the

[1] Dryden's *Theodore and Honoria*, princip.

fire, and holding a small print close to my eyes, launch into the full tide of Dryden's couplets (a stream of sound), comparing his didactic and descriptive pomp with the simple pathos and picturesque truth of Boccaccio's story, and tasting with a pleasure, which none but an habitual reader can feel, some quaint examples of pronunciation in this accomplished versifier.

> 'Which when Honoria view'd,
> The fresh *impulse* her former fright renew'd.'[1]

> 'And made th' *insult*, which in his grief appears,
> The means to mourn thee with my pious tears.'[2]

These trifling instances of the wavering and unsettled state of the language give double effect to the firm and stately march of the verse, and make me dwell with a sort of tender interest on the difficulties and doubts of an earlier period of literature. They pronounced words then in a manner which we should laugh at now; and they wrote verse in a manner which we can do anything but laugh at. The pride of a new acquisition seems to give fresh confidence to it; to impel the rolling syllables through the moulds provided for them, and to overflow the envious bounds of rhyme into time-honoured triplets.

What sometimes surprises me in looking back to the past, is, with the exception already stated, to find myself so little changed in the time. The same images and trains of thought stick by me: I have the same tastes, likings, sentiments, and wishes that I had then. One great ground of confidence and support has, indeed, been struck from under my feet; but I have made it up to myself by proportionable pertinacity of opinion. The success of the great cause, to which I had vowed myself, was to me more than all the world: I had a strength in its strength,

[1] Dryden's *Theodore and Honoria*, princip.
[2] Dryden's *Sigismonda and Guiscardo.*

a resource which I knew not of, till it failed me for the second time.

> 'Fall'n was Glenartny's stately tree!
> Oh! ne'er to see Lord Ronald more!'

It was not till I saw the axe laid to the root, that I found the full extent of what I had to lose and suffer. But my conviction of the right was only established by the triumph of the wrong; and my earliest hopes will be my last regrets. One source of this unbendingness (which some may call obstinacy), is that, though living much alone, I have never worshipped the Echo. I see plainly enough that black is not white, that the grass is green, that kings are not their subjects; and, in such self-evident cases, do not think it necessary to collate my opinions with the received prejudices. In subtler questions, and matters that admit of doubt, as I do not impose my opinion on others without a reason, so I will not give up mine to them without a better reason; and a person calling me names, or giving himself airs of authority, does not convince me of his having taken more pains to find out the truth than I have, but the contrary. Mr. Gifford once said, that 'while I was sitting over my gin and tobacco-pipes, I fancied myself a Leibnitz.' He did not so much as know that I had ever read a metaphysical book:—was I therefore, out of complaisance or deference to him, to forget whether I had or not? Leigh Hunt is puzzled to reconcile the shyness of my pretensions with the inveteracy and sturdiness of my principles. I should have thought they were nearly the same thing. Both from disposition and habit, I can *assume* nothing in word, look, or manner. I cannot steal a march upon public opinion in any way. My standing upright, speaking loud, entering a room gracefully, proves nothing; therefore I neglect these ordinary means of recommending myself to the good graces and admiration of strangers (and, as it appears, even of philosophers and friends). Why? Because I have

other resources, or, at least, am absorbed in other studies and pursuits. Suppose this absorption to be extreme, and even morbid—that I have brooded over an idea till it has become a kind of substance in my brain, that I have reasons for a thing which I have found out with much labour and pains, and to which I can scarcely do justice without the utmost violence of exertion (and that only to a few persons)—is this a reason for my playing off my out-of-the-way notions in all companies, wearing a prim and self-complacent air, as if I were 'the admired of all observers'? or is it not rather an argument (together with a want of animal spirits), why I should retire into myself, and perhaps acquire a nervous and uneasy look, from a consciousness of the disproportion between the interest and conviction I feel on certain subjects, and my ability to communicate what weighs upon my own mind to others? If my ideas, which I do not avouch, but suppose, lie below the surface, why am I to be always attempting to dazzle superficial people with them, or smiling, delighted, at my own want of success?

In matters of taste and feeling, one proof that my conclusions have not been quite shallow or hasty, is the circumstance of their having been lasting. I have the same favourite books, pictures, passages that I ever had: I may therefore presume that they will last me my life—nay, I may indulge a hope that my thoughts will survive me. This continuity of impression is the only thing on which I pride myself. Even Lamb, whose relish of certain things is as keen and earnest as possible, takes a surfeit of admiration, and I should be afraid to ask about his select authors or particular friends, after a lapse of ten years. As to myself, any one knows where to have me. What I have once made up my mind to, I abide by to the end of the chapter. One cause of my independence of opinion is, I believe, the liberty I give to others, or the very diffidence and distrust of making converts. I should be an excellent man on a jury. I might say little, but should starve 'the other eleven obstinate

fellows' out. I remember Mr. Godwin writing to Mr. Wordsworth, that 'his tragedy of *Antonio* could not fail of success.' It was damned past all redemption. I said to Mr. Wordsworth that I thought this a natural consequence; for how could any one have a dramatic turn of mind who judged entirely of others from himself? Mr. Godwin might be convinced of the excellence of his work; but how could he know that others would be convinced of it, unless by supposing that they were as wise as himself, and as infallible critics of dramatic poetry—so many Aristotles sitting in judgment on Euripides! This shows why pride is connected with shyness and reserve; for the really proud have not so high an opinion of the generality as to suppose that they can understand them, or that there is any common measure between them. So Dryden exclaims of his opponents with bitter disdain—

'Nor can I think what thoughts they can conceive.'

I have not sought to make partisans, still less did I dream of making enemies; and have therefore kept my opinions myself, whether they were currently adopted or not. To get others to come into our ways of thinking, we must go over to theirs; and it is necessary to follow, in order to lead. At the time I lived here formerly, I had no suspicion that I should ever become a voluminous writer, yet I had just the same confidence in my feelings before I had ventured to air them in public as I have now. Neither the outcry *for* or *against* moves me a jot: I do not say that the one is not more agreeable than the other.

Not far from the spot where I write, I first read Chaucer's *Flower and Leaf*, and was charmed with that young beauty, shrouded in her bower, and listening with ever-fresh delight to the repeated song of the nightingale close by her—the impression of the scene, the vernal landscape, the cool of the morning, the gushing notes of the songstress,

'And ayen methought she sung close by mine ear,'

is as vivid as if it had been of yesterday; and nothing can persuade me that that is not a fine poem. I do not find this impression conveyed in Dryden's version, and therefore nothing can persuade me that that is as fine. I used to walk out at this time with Mr. and Miss Lamb of an evening, to look at the Claude Lorraine skies over our heads melting from azure into purple and gold, and to gather mushrooms, that sprung up at our feet, to throw into our hashed mutton at supper. I was at that time an enthusiastic admirer of Claude, and could dwell for ever on one or two of the finest prints from him hung round my little room; the fleecy flocks, the bending trees, the winding streams, the groves, the nodding temples, the air-wove hills, and distant sunny vales; and tried to translate them into their lovely living hues. People then told me that Wilson was much superior to Claude: I did not believe them. Their pictures have since been seen together at the British Institution, and all the world have come into my opinion. I have not, on that account, given it up. I will not compare our hashed mutton with Amelia's; but it put us in mind of it, and led to a discussion, sharply seasoned and well sustained, till midnight, the result of which appeared some years after in the *Edinburgh Review*. Have I a better opinion of those criticisms on that account, or should I therefore maintain them with greater vehemence and tenaciousness? Oh no: Both rather with less, now that they are before the public, and it is for them to make their election.

It is in looking back to such scenes that I draw my best consolation for the future. Later impressions come and go, and serve to fill up the intervals; but these are my standing resource, my true classics. If I have had few real pleasures or advantages, my ideas, from their sinewy texture, have been to me in the nature of realities; and if I should not be able to add to the stock, I can live by husbanding the interest. As to my speculations, there is little to admire in them but my admiration of others; and whether they

have an echo in time to come or not, I have learned to set a grateful value on the past, and am content to wind up the account of what is personal only to myself and the immediate circle of objects in which I have moved, with an act of easy oblivion,

'And curtain-close such scene from every future view.'

WINTERSLOW, *Feb.* 20, 1828.

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